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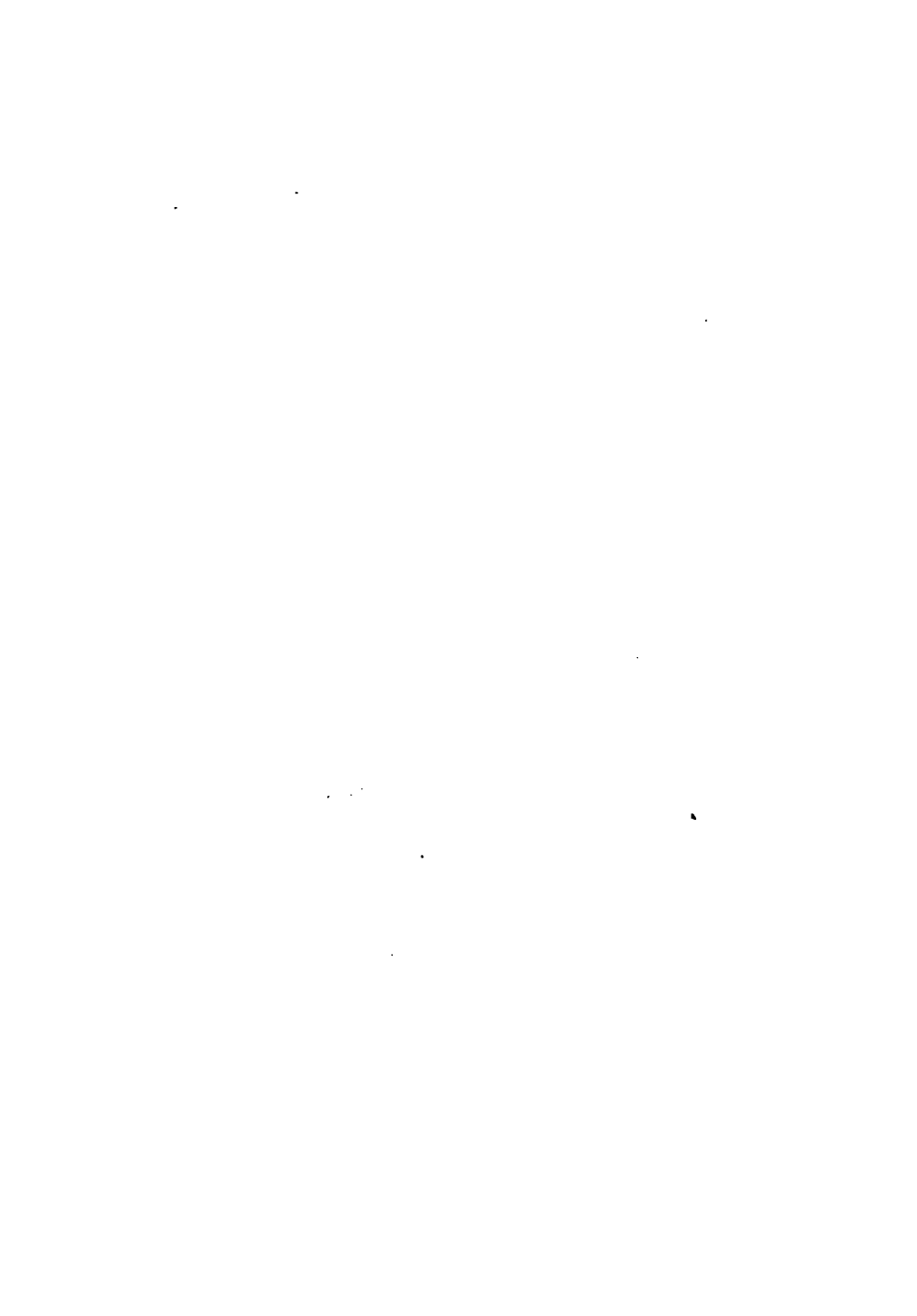
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NEW ENGLAND FOLKS

EUGENE W. PRESBREY





NEW ENGLAND FOLKS

A LOVE STORY

By EUGENE W. PRESBREY

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"It's all right now. Why 'f anythin' went wrong 'tween you
two—I—God bless ye!"

Frontispiece p. 80

NEW ENGLAND FOLKS

A LOVE STORY

BY
EUGENE W. PRESEBY.

"The story of the life of a New England
family from the first settlement to the
present day."



G. W. DILLINGHAM COMPANY
PUBLISHERS. NEW YORK.



NEW ENGLAND FOLKS

A LOVE STORY

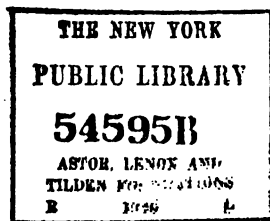
BY
EUGENE W. PRESBREY, 1853-1931

"The desire of the moth for the star—
Of the night for the morrow."

SHELLEY



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PUBLISHERS NEW YORK



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NEW ENGLAND FOLKS

**TO THE DEAREST OF ALL NEW ENGLAND WOMEN,
MOTHER.**

NOV 19 FEB 38

CONTENTS.

I. THE PARSON AND THE BULL.....	11
II. "THE STREET".....	30
III. A MYSTERY.....	35
IV. IF JOE LOVED FAITH.....	42
V. "HIRED HELP".....	45
VI. JOE TALKS TO HIS FATHER.....	56
VII. THE VILLAGE LAWYER.....	63
VIII. "FAITH AND JOE".....	73
IX. CONSIDER MORTON.....	81
X. JOE DOES THE WRONG THING.....	87
XI. "TO THE CITY".....	93
XII. "NEW YORK".....	101
XIII. "A SPIDER'S WEB".....	108
XIV. JOE'S LUCK.....	124
XV. ABIDING FAITH.....	130
XVI. THE PRODIGAL.....	135
XVII. A DAY OF THANKSGIVING.....	142
XVIII. PIQUE.....	149
XIX. THE NEW YEAR.....	154
XX. DUNHAM, EDGELEY & CO.....	164
XXI. IF JOE LOVED ROSE.....	169
XXII. "A DAMNED LIE".....	178
XXIII. "OF THE NIGHT FOR THE MORROW".....	182
XXIV. "MORTGAGED".....	191
XXV. THE TRIAL.....	199
XXVI. THE LAWYER'S INVESTMENT.....	209
XXVII. "FAITH AND HONOR".....	219
XXVIII. "THE FOUNDATION FOR A NEW HOUSE".....	225

ILLUSTRATIONS.

	PAGE
"It's all right now. Why 'f anythin' went wrong 'tween you two—I—God bless ye!" <i>Frontispiece</i>	80
"I can never be happy here. I've got to go away and have a chance at the world myself"	76
"Merciful Father . . . seems like he's broke her young heart!"	92
It was coming now sure, she thought. She lifted the cover and looked into the churn to hide her nervousness . . .	213

NEW ENGLAND FOLKS.

CHAPTER I.

THE PARSON AND THE BULL.

"CONSIDER MORTON kin beat any man 'n this County in a trade, 'n he hain't missed a town meetin' 'n twenty years."

"What'er that?"

"Wal, this's town meetin' day, ain't it?"

"Guess 'tis."

"Wal, I'll bet ye my jackknife agin a chaw'er to-backer 't Sid swaps suthin' 'fore he goes home."

"Say hoss 'n I'll hev'ter go ye."

"No'p! Wagon. Sid generally swaps fur suthin' he wants. He don't need a new hoss."

It was summer; in a New England village with one street; a week before haying time. These speculators upon the doing of another were lounging, regardless of a hot afternoon sun, upon an old settee on the narrow piazza of the only store in the village. They were waiting in a general way for the one mail a day, for gossip, for something to happen, or, as they would have expressed it, for "suthin' ter turn up."

Inside: a shock-haired, barefoot boy, with ragged shirt, and one suspender that threatened to pull the much-patched blue jean overalls over one shoulder; with a general aspect that should not be taken as indicative of poverty so much as natural economy, was waiting for the postmaster.

The postmaster made both ends meet by adding to government trust, general storekeeping, tax collecting, road surveying, and the general agency for all nostrums, patent medicines, farming implements, etc. Sos' Warner kept a general trading store in which most of the goods were handled on commission, the postmaster's salary and time being the only invested capital.

"Ye hain't got no m'lasses, have ye?" said the boy, knowing as well as the flies that molasses was one of the staple products of the village store and having brought the jug to be filled. The boy was born with that New England vernacular under his tongue which always puts a question mark in every utterance, the rest of the sentence is assertive and unconsciously indicative of untrammelled independence. It is a matter of form and usually contradicts the known facts.

The postmaster ceased wondering who the half dozen uncalled for letters were from, and what about, to draw the molasses; then, sending the boy trudging homeward over the hot road he joined the group outside.

"Ain't nothin' new, is there?" said he.

Two or three of those addressed shifted quid to other cheek, then, with simultaneous motive and aim, drowned an unsuspecting fly at four-yards range without considering the event worth comment. Not one, if properly started, who could not reel off gossip faster than Sos' Warner could measure calico, but the right impetus was

wanting, or silence was felt to be more eloquent. Being silent involves the possibility of knowing something worth saying; so the New England gossip, who knows the potent significance of shut lips, uses it chiefly to emphasize what he is "dying to say." It was so now and Sos' waited for somebody else to start the gossip.

"Wal, I think Joe Morton's a derned fool!" This personal opinion came from Medad Hill, a six-foot man of bone and muscle who might be twenty-two or three years old, with faded blue eyes and hair the color of Sos' Warner's cheapest sugar.

"Do' know 'bout that," said Warner.

"Guess Sid's wrong not ter let Joe go ter New York if he's sot on it. Ain't no money 'n farmin'."

"Is, the way Sid farms. There's money 'n anythin' for Sid."

"Sid is putty well fixed. Farm and stock must be worth five or six thousand dollars."

"Tha's right, Sos', 'n Joe'll have it all. Now ain't he a fool not ter stay ter home 'n be contented?"

"Wal, no—can't say 's he is. Farmers don't keep all the young stock, there'd be too much on't 'f they did; they fat it up 'n send it ter feed the cities with. Guess Joe thinks he 's worth more turned fer beef 'n he is grubbin' 'round on the farm."

"Mebbe," said Medad, "but it 's darned poor farmin' ter let stock run out! Joe's the only young stock in the Morton family."

"How 'bout the girl—Faith?" some one asked.

"She's jest 'dopted," continued Medad, "'n everybody knows 't Sid wants her ter marry Joe sometime. Gosh! Ain't Joe a darned fool!"

"Old man's put his foot down, hain't he?" asked Warner.

"Yep, solid!" said Medad, who worked at the Morton farm at odd times, and could speak with authority. "'N I guess that settles it!"

"Do' know 'bout that," said Warner, "Joe's twenty-one 'n got a right ter do 's he wants ter; he needn't ask no odds 've anybody. 'F Sid's too stiff first thing he knows Joe'll skip. I'm thinkin' that the minister aimed his sermon at Sid last Sunday."

"Gosh! anybody k'd see that! Moral suasion 's all right 'nough, but yer can't use the stuff on Joe Morton. The point 's jest here, Joe 's wanted ter go so long 't he won't be worth a hill 'er beans if he stays ter home now. 'Ye k'n drive a horse ter water but ye can't make him drink.' Joe 's got grit."

"They do say 't the minister's goin' ter talk ter Sid 'bout lettin' Joe go," said Warner, who generally knew what was going to happen; gossip always found its way to the store.

"Wal, the only way ter move a stun wall is ter shift one stun 't a time," said Medad, "nobody k'n move Sid when his mind's sot, 'n Joe 's jest like his father, chip er the old block. I'd jest like ter hear the minister tackle him."

"Wal, the people er all talkin'," said Warner. This was undeniably true, the people were "talking." The only basis for talk rested upon the fact that Consider Morton's only son Joe wanted to give up farming and go to New York to carve out a way in the world for himself, and the fond, doting old father couldn't bear the thought of parting with his only son. That was all; but the people who talked had their own versions of the mat-

ter, not one, but a dozen ; these versions had been transplanted—had taken root, crossed and recrossed, until the general impression was fixed, that Joe Morton and his father had “quarreled scandalously,” which was not true.

There were factions that stood by Joe against those who sided with his father. Joe’s sympathizers “allowed” that it wasn’t right for the old man to lay out Joe’s life for him—Joe ought to have his say. Most of these had daughters ready enough to marry Joe for the simple asking, of this, however, there was little hope if the old man had his way, for his fondest wish was that Joe, and Faith, the adopted child, would some day marry and give him grandchildren to play about his knee when age crept on. The coming of Faith had been another topic for talk years before that had, like a volcano, raged, erupted, and at last, died out, leaving an unfathomable crater. That was before the farmer’s wife died, “as good a woman as ever breathed”; but neither she, nor Sid, nor Abby his old maid sister who took up the household cares, nor anybody else, could or would tell the anxious gossips where the baby girl came from so mysteriously. But there she came, just old enough to smile and crow a little, be named Faithful Morton and adopted forever into the hearts of Farmer Morton and his wife. She came in the midst of winter; she was not born in the village and no one saw her brought to the Mortons; that’s all the neighbors ever knew. Some, with envy in their hearts, for Sid was prosperous now, professed to believe that he knew Faith’s antecedents, that they were rich, and that his motives for planning a marriage between Joe and Faith were mercenary. But those with daughters considered it scandalous to let Joe marry any girl with a borrowed name. And so the tongues wagged and wagged, never

getting things just right, until, for lack of specific facts, the subject took general form and settled into the question of proper paternal government. Then the minister took it up and really had preached a bit at Sid on Sunday with "moral suasion" for a text. This sermon might not have particularly touched Sid, but for the fact that the entire congregation kept ears for the minister's words and eyes on Sid, to see how he'd take it. To say truly—Sid took it very well. He took it away with him, resolved to await his turn; not considering Sunday, in church, the best time and place to resent unasked-for advice that wasn't needed. It transpired that the middle of the road was destined to be Sid's pulpit. It happened this way:

Sid had left home in the morning, to attend a special town meeting "down at the center," properly equipped for a trade that might be to his advantage. His outfit, horse, harness and buggy, was carefully selected from his plentiful stock with business views in mind. Sid hoped to find a good stout "running gear" to fit a pretty good buggy top that he had taken in some previous trade, that is; he wanted a set of wheels and "exes" that were well made and sound. He "guessed that somebody else was jest 's likely to have the right running gear as he was to have the right top and he'd find 'em sometime."

Sid preserved his record for never missing a town meeting, found the thing he wanted, another man as anxious to trade as he, and, after much "dicker" he swapped his old buggy and newer harness for a comparatively new "running gear," with damaged top which he could afford to throw away, and a two-year-old half Durham bull "to boot," which he was to call for at the owner's farm on the way home.

And so, Sid, well pleased with his day, with the sleepy bull tied to stout hind "ex" of the new buggy by strong lead rope; from time to time thoughtfully flicking the teasing flies from the flanks of the horse, with braided lash on the home-made hickory whipstock; or, saying a friendly word or two to the dog who always replied with speech in his eyes and by wagging an imaginary tail; drove slowly along the country road.

It was two miles to "The Street." Sid had plenty of time to think over the gossip of the neighbors and the rather pointed words of the minister. The more he thought the less inclined he was to "turn the other cheek." Sid was not what his neighbors would call a "professor"; he did more than the others combined to keep the meeting house open the year round and the minister decently paid; but he didn't make prayers in public or swear in private, though he came as dangerously near profanity, when excited, as one reasonably could without being convicted of the habit. "Dodgasted old waggle tongues!" he caught himself saying aloud, as he remembered some special gossip of the present or past; they had talked themselves blind over Faith years ago; they had talked till they were blue in the face because he wouldn't marry a second wife, if for no other reason, to be a mother to Joe and Faith; and now they were talking again. Not that Sid harbored ill-will, not he, his heart was too big and kindly and he loved all men because they were created in God's image; and, really, all men loved Sid, too; they couldn't help it. Nobody knew better than Sid that no real harm was meant by the gossip; the people *must* talk, it was bred in the bone. Their own poor lives were too simple to fill all waking thoughts, and so they talked about each other. He could stand it,

but it was nagging Joe and hurting Faith, and things were n't going right with Joe 'n Faith. Why couldn't people mind their own business; half the folks in The Street were egging Joe on to quit the farm where he was born and lose himself in the whirlpool of the city and it made Sid alternately sick at heart and angry to think of it. They had talked it over from time to time, Joe and his father. Sid had coaxed, pleaded with Joe, but in vain—and, finally, had firmly refused to give his consent to Joe's project. In quiet, friendly intercourse, he might be convinced that to "put his foot down" was the wrong way to deter Joe, but busy tongues and preaching for a month of Sundays wouldn't convince him—and he'd tell the parson so. At this point in his considerations, about half a mile from the waiting gossips at the store, he met the minister.

A third person would have said that the minister bore few outward evidences of his calling. He was tall, with strong, well-knit, half athletic figure, hair and complexion usually called sandy; the eyes were frank and full, and there was the color of good blood in his cheeks; in fact, he looked more like a horny handed laborer than he did like a man of the cloth. There was reason enough for this: John Denning couldn't remember when he hadn't labored with his hands to keep body and soul together. He was self-made, self-educated and the process had compelled him to give more time to hard work than to prayer or faith. He was thirty-five years old, unmarried, not yet ordained, but with a license to preach the word, and had been called to fill the pulpit "on trial." And a trial, indeed, it promised to be; for his flock fastened all matters of faith to the thirty-nine articles of the creed with hammer and nails. They were creed all through and hard shell on

the surface. When the parson faced them with their shells put on for Sunday, he felt his words bounding back to him like pebbles from a stone wall, and he wondered why they had called him, even on trial. The deacons and committee had their reasons. The last minister had a weak voice, seven children, and a wife who managed badly; the deacons, particularly, couldn't remember his sermon after "thirdly" for by that time everybody went to sleep. The deacons felt that the church needed shaking up; so they called a younger man with a voice that could keep them awake, and one whose support would be less of a tax.

"Good afternoon, Brother Morton." The minister spoke first and the knowing old horse stopped without a suggestion from Sid. After ten years of intimate association the horse and Sid knew each other thoroughly; when anybody spoke to Sid the horse always stopped, for Sid was never content to pass on with a mere salutation; he wanted to "talk."

"How'dé parson, how'dé! Glad I met ye. You're just the man I wanted to see—ye see"—— began Sid, but the parson interrupted:

"I wish to apologize for preaching at you last Sunday," said he.

This was a flank movement and broke Sid's attack. The minister waited for the reply that Sid seemed in no haste to make. Consider Morton wasn't a man to speak in haste; that wasn't his way. Nature had set a hall mark upon Sid that one might read at sight. His strong hands, big body, broad shoulders and round genial face, that was free from marks of care or age and better fitted for smiles than anger; these were outward evidences of big heart and big soul within.

The minister waited. Sid slowly swung the dangling whiplash like a pendulum, till it made an arc long enough to reach an obstinate fly at the shoulder of the patient old horse, who looked around with a nod of gratitude.

"Wal, there ain't no bones broke, I guess," said Sid, with a genial smile.

"I'm glad of that," said the minister, readily understanding the idiom to mean that the farmer bore no resentment. "I suppose I was carried away by the general gossip; it did not occur to me till after that I was not minding my own business."

"Wal, now 't you 've got yer hand in, ye might 's well go a leetle farther. I wish ye'd talk ter Joe," said Sid.

"About giving up the farm for life in the city?" asked the minister.

"No, 'bout givin' up the city and goin' ter farmin'," said Sid. "His mind's goin' one way 'n his body another. Nuther one on 'em's doin' any good."

"He is ambitious."

"He's restless as a rollin' stone!"

"And you fear that he will gather no moss."

"Wal, they say à rollin' stone don't git much," said Sid.

"What does he say?"

"Says 'f he stays ter home, he'll be covered with it. It's ben goin' on fer two or three years now, t'll Joe's got ter be like a square peg in a round hole. He don't fit nowhere. Lord! Lord! I don't know what ter do! What would you say?"

"Ask God to bless him and let him go out to face the world."

"I can't! I can't! He's all I've got in the world ter live for!" The minister saw tears in the farmer's eyes;

tears that told stronger than any words could tell of the great love this lonely old father had for the only son, and he mentally reversed his judgment. "That would probably destroy many of your cherished plans for him."

"Worse'n that. It would take all the heart right out of me! I've done nothin' but plan for Joe ever sence he was born. I've laid out his whole life for him"——

"Wasn't that a mistake? Haven't you taken his sense of independence away from him?"

"I never thought of that."

"A boy measuring the first strength of manhood hates to be compelled."

"I planned for his good."

"Did you consult him?"

"No"——

"Wasn't that a mistake? I've never had a son to rear, but if God ever gives me one, I think I'll take him into partnership just as soon as he is old enough to know that his father can be his best friend."

"That ain't Scripture," said the farmer: "'Spare the rod 'n spoil the child.'"

"Have you carried that out, literally, with Joe?"

"Never struck him 'n my life."

"Don't now. Don't use your force upon him because he is trying his strength against yours; he thinks he is right."

"I know I am!" The minister saw now the obstinate side of Sid's character. It was this that had made the neighbors sympathize with Joe. "Nothin' the matter with Sid Morton, only—he's so darned stubbed!" they said; and when Het' Smith, who was "hired help" at the Morton farm, told Sally Waite in strict confidence, and Sally went right straight over and told Eli Hubbard's

wife, who made Sos' Warner's wife promise not to let it go any further, that Sid Morton had "put his foot down about Joe's leaving the farm for New York;" she hadn't the least intention of setting the whole village "by the ears," but she had most successfully brought about that result. Sos' Warner's wife told the story to the sewing circle, under ban of secrecy, but the tale had now assumed the proportions of quarrel between Sid and Joe and was too big to be kept indoors; so it was all over town.

The tears in the farmer's eyes had set the minister right, however; the farmer might be obstinate, wrong in his method, but his heart was right.

"I'll talk to your son. I'll try to make him see things as you do, if I can," said the minister.

"Ye will?"

"Yes, on one condition. If you will forgive me for saying so—I don't think the substance of my sermon last Sunday was far wrong after all; take part of it to heart. Don't use force! You know what I mean; mental and moral force is as hard to endure sometimes as physical compulsion. Try my "moral suasion" with your son.

"Ye don't know Joe!" said Sid.

"I think I do," said the minister, looking at the father, noting the firm corners of his mouth and the strong chin supporting them.

"He's like you, isn't he?"

"Chip 'er the old block, I guess."

Like agrees with unlike; the minister thought of a scientific axiom that seemed to fit the circumstances.

"If you wish to keep your son with you, Mr. Morton, don't tell him that he *must* stay. He will use force if you do. You wouldn't have him go without your consent, would you?"

"Joe'd never do that!"

"Don't be too sure. I'll talk with him, however."

"I hate ter trouble ye, parson, but I'll do's much for you if I ever git a chance," said Sid, gratefully.

"You can do as much for me, and more. You can do it now if you will," said the minister, earnestly.

"Good Lord, how!"

"Tell me what to preach to these people; you've known them all their lives, I haven't. I come to them on probation and they expect me to please them. I daresay I should discover in time, what they like; tell me if you can."

Sid leaned forward with his elbows resting on his knees and drew snake tracks in the dust of the road with his whiplash. There was a curious, half humorous twinkle in his eyes while the minister waited, anxiously, for his reply.

"Give 'em hell fire 'n damnation."

For a moment the minister was shocked beyond expression—but Sid's eyes looked frankly into his. His words were not profane. He was evidently in earnest, but the curious twinkle still remained.

"I don't think I understand you," said the minister.

"Wal, we're a curious lot up here in the hills," said Sid. "We don't bother much 'bout religion week days—mebbe we're too busy, guess we put it away in camphor with the Sunday go-ter-meetin'-clothes; but when Sunday comes we want it, mornin', arternoon, 'n evenin', 'n we want it hot! Give us the word accordin' ter creed in the mornin', 'n the arternoon we wantter be plowed 'n harrerred; scared hard enough ter last a week. It's the straight 'n narrer way ter salvation or the broad 'n easy one ter perdition; ye can't make one too hard 'n narrer nor the

other too wide 'n easy ter suit us. 'N ye can't leave us half way up neither. Ye've just got ter have us all goin' one way er t'other. If ye don't make us darned good 'n uncomfortable ye won't be earnin' yer pay Mr. Denning.

"That's the old, hard religion," Morton.

"I know it. It's older 'n the hills 'n harden'n flint. 'N the older 'tis 'n the harder, the better they like it," said Sid, thoughtfully, unconsciously separating himself from them." The minister noted that.

"Is there no softness in their natures?"

"Wal, I'd know. Kinder seems to me, sometims, 't they're harder Sundays 'n they be any other time: but Lord! Lord! ye can't blame *them*. It's nothin' but work! work! from one year ter another, all their lives, 'n git nothin' for it but a livin', 'n not much of a one at that. There ain't no easy way for 'em. 'Moral Suasion!' Lord, what d'they know about it! Ye've got ter drill 'n blast 'n break with a stone hammer ter git anythin' outer most er these hill farms, 'n the worst of it is they ain't growin' no better; frost heaves up a new crop er rocks every spring 'n then ye have ter begin all over again. I tell ye, most er the land round New England was run out years 'n years ago. 'N the folks are runnin' out, too, 'er else gittin' so hard 'n ston'y 't ye can't git much out of 'em."

"But all the land is n't bad," said the minister.

"No, it aint all bad, nor the folks ain't all hard. I've got a good likely place. But there ain't good land 'nough ter go 'round. That's the trouble. Every year somebody's gettin' out, movin' West er somewhere. Guess all the farmin' 'll be done out there by 'n bye. Farmin's queer business, Mr. Denning. All the best stuff goes ter market 'n what we can't sell we keep for ourselves. It's

the best folks that goes, too. So ye see we kinder get dreened out. But that don't help you any; you're here'n you've got ter take folks 'n things as ye find 'em. Give it to 'em hot 'n straight every Sunday; the onhappier ye make 'em feel the better they'll like ye for it. Jest try it 'n see. Some wheat takes a lot er thrashin' ter separate it from the straw and ye have ter use a flail 'n use it hard."

Sid did not intentionally separate himself from his neighbors in giving his estimate of them to the minister, but he was unconsciously consistent in doing so for he was not cast in the same mould. Most of them were hard and uncompromising all through; Sid had a softer, sweeter side in his nature. Many took religion with a sense of awful responsibility, went to church as martyrs had gone to the stake; they got a grim sort of satisfaction out of the prospect of torture or deprivation; suffering of body and soul must be the price of a future existence; life, considered from a religious point of view, was a perpetual purgatory, a forge whereon souls were hammered, beaten into shape for eternity; but whether for an eternity of heaven or of hell, was, apparently, a thing of constant doubt. Few, if any, seemed sure of salvation or felt the joyous certainty of a "mansion in the skies" as they would have rejoiced if one who had loved them, and had died, had bestowed upon them an earthly mansion.

Many sought in religion a curious species of emotional excitement: calm and temperate in all other phases of life they were intemperate, mentally drunken with religious fervor, whenever the opportunity afforded; they called it the "pouring out of the spirit" and under its influence they reached a state of physical and mental exaltation curious to behold. This was a state of emotional ex-

citement bordering upon frenzy during which men and women would shout in ecstasy, fall writhing upon the floor, or faint from excess of uncontrollable emotion. This excitement was contagious and easily communicated, under favorable circumstances, to others, and when it attacked one who was not a recognized "professor" he was at once claimed as a "brand plucked from the burning" and was said to have "got religion." The "brand from the burning" did not always stay plucked; some there were who were proverbial "backsliders," who, with the reaction, fell back into the old unregenerate ways often to be revived again in the next wave of religious fervor that swept over the community.

Sid had never been a backslider because he never had "professed." His emotions were genuine; never forced or fictitious. He was a natural, self-centered man, who believed in God and love, found them both within himself and tried to make a practical, every-day application of his latent religion; Sid said he "didn't believe that God was so far off 't ye had ter shout ter make him hear." But Sid, thanks to this chat with the minister, was ready to think that he had been too hard and uncompromising with Joe. He was right in his estimate of the parson's congregation as a whole, they wanted salvation threshed into them with a flail.

The situation had humor in it and the minister felt it. "It seems that we must exchange methods," said he. "I must put my foot down, as the gossips say, and you must take yours up; I mustn't use moral suasion with my people and you must with yours."

How much longer Sid and the minister would have chatted in the hot afternoon sun may never be known, for, without warning, an opportunity arose to make practical

application of the two methods discussed. Sid's battered, knowing old dog, with the scars of a hundred battles upon him, having spent an hour under the wagon, sleeping, waking, yawning, panting, killing time and flies; grew tired of waiting. After showing in various ways his contempt for both sides of the argument, he rose, shook himself, and with evident malice aforethought, barked loudly and pretended to spring at the nose of the sleepy bull. The effect was instantaneous and all that any dog could have desired. The bull snorted, jumped backward with a jerk that broke the rope that tied him to the wagon and turned upon the dog, who liked nothing better than an argument of his own which he proceeded to conduct with great spirit.

When the bull parted company with the wagon, Sid was jolted out of the seat like a stone from a catapult, saying things that sounded very much like the sort of sermon he advised the parson to preach. The parson, on the other side of the wagon, with one foot on the hub of the wheel, was thrown into the dusty road.

"Confound that dog! he ought to be shot!" said the disturbed minister picking himself up.

"Never mind the dog, parson, help me catch the bull; it's a good chance to try your moral suasion," said Sid with a grin, as he reached for the dog with a cut of the whip. The stumptailed cause of all the trouble now seeming quite content to shift all responsibility over results, jumped into the wagon, and, from the seat, with hanging tongue and open mouth proceeded to umpire the contest. The bull was thoroughly aroused and at bay; with escape shut off, up the road, by the minister, who was softly calling "Boss, boss! Co' boss"; down the road, by the farmer and his ready whip. These two oppo-

site forces advancing upon him, with an occasional bark from the umpire, quickly developed the bull's strategy; breaking away at right angles he found an easy jump over the wall and started for the woods through Deacon Waite's best mowing lot; Sid and the parson after him. The minister had held sprinting records in earlier days before dignity had to be supported, and Sid, though heavy, had the sort of muscles that are raised on a farm; but the bull was in the hot flush of youthful strength that had never known a tax. The first heat was through the tall grass straight away to the middle of the mowing lot where the bull paused, with a playful shake of his short horns, to breathe in through his pink nostrils the air of freedom. The parson and Sid followed in his wake; Sid vowing that he would trade that dog for a stone image and wishing he had four legs instead of two. Then, as they drew near, the bull executed a series of expanding circles, looking for an opening in the fences, with every leap sending ripe herbage, roots and all, high in the air. Tiring of this, he deftly tossed a top rail from the fence and jumped into the neighboring pasture with trout-brook gurgling through it. Standing ankle deep in the cool brook he refreshed himself and waited for his pursuers who came panting after. For half an hour the bull made a moat of that brook and successfully defended himself, first one side, then the other, then in the middle of it, till Sid and the minister were saturated with water and perspiration and glad to halt for rest.

"Why 'n thunder don't ye use 'moral suasion'?" said Sid.

"Why don't you try force?" retorted the minister.

It was a long chase in hot summer weather; from a distance it looked like a hurdle race between two men and

a bull, with the minister a fair second and Sid a bad third. The race ended when the bull was satisfied and ended just where it began; in the road, close by the wagon, the old horse patiently kicking off such flies as he could reach with a hind foot, the front part of him apparently asleep, and the laughing, stumptailed dog on the wagon seat. The parson, who had finally got near enough to try his system again, had at last seized the bull by the horns and was sprawling ingloriously in the ditch; Sid, on the other side of the road, was trying to staunch his bleeding nose with a piece of rotten fence rail; the bull, having had his fun, put his nose into the tail-end of the wagon and stood wondering why somebody didn't tie him again.

The minister sat up and rubbed his sore spots gently. "Brother Morton," said he, "I begin to see new light. Moral suasion is most efficient with the weak and helpless, but brute force must be compelled."

"Wal," said Sid, "I see a leetle new light myself. If the bull hadn't been nagged he wouldn't have got his back up, 'n that's the matter with Joe. We've just got ter stop the gossip in this community!"

A little later, the waiting gossips, at the store saw the mud-stained minister, and Sid, with marks of conflict on his face, walking silently up the road followed by horse, wagon, and bull.

"Jeru-sa-lem!" ejaculated Medad. "Sid has licked the minister!"

"Looks as though the minister has licked Sid!" said Sos'.

"Wal, he's traded wagons anyway—I'm goin' up street to tell the news."

CHAPTER II.

"THE STREET."

ON many a high hilltop, commanding a wide view of the surrounding country, rests the typical New England village of one street.

That street was once an Indian trail that cunningly kept to high ground for self-protection; the better to see an approaching enemy. The white man blazing his first path in the wilderness, seeking greater freedom than civilization and his own kind would grant; forced back to the first law of Nature, learned shrewdness from his new enemy and chose the red man's trail for his building spot.

The first trees felled, the first logs hewed, the first ground broken, the first tones of command, the first words of mutual encouragement; all these were given for the general good and safety. Man must have a sanctuary, a refuge; and so, the meeting house was the first structure reared; not more for religious or devotional motives than as a means of defense; it was a mental, moral, and physical fortification. The high belfry, without a bell, was a sheltered conning tower for the sharp-eyed sentinel; the thick log walls, pierced by narrow windows, with room enough within for every man, woman and child in the settlement, gave a shelter or a refuge in peace or strife. Its steeple, viewed from afar, pointed skyward, like the index finger on a closed hand, raised in warning. The sanctuary and the refuge finished; houses were built,

nestling and clustering like timid chicks around the mother hen.

The heart of most New England villages has but one artery running straight through it. With the disappearance of the Indian enemies it gradually acquired a more distant system of veins and venulets, but the center is where the church is.

That early spirit of mutual interest, made necessary for mutual protection, is still more strongly perpetuated in the character of those who people the New England village of to-day. In early days, a shot from the musket of the sentinel posted in the belfry or on the roof of the general meeting house brought men from the plow or the hunt, women and children from the fireside; that which had aroused the interest of one must be shared with others, considered and acted upon by all. The growth of the centuries may change environment, but it cannot greatly change human nature; watchfulness on the hill-tops has driven the dusky enemies from the higher to the lower levels and, finally, from the land; the highways of marching progress need no longer cling to mountain tops for safety and self-protection; and so, the iron horse over the iron road runs swiftly through the lowland valleys with the newer civilization congesting near it, but the pioneer who hewed the way is left stranded on the hills. The blood that flows in that single artery is much like that which pulsed in the earlier days. The sentinel left his tower, forever, when the enemy departed from the valley below; now, stroke of the silver-toned bell, that has taken the sentinel's place, on Sunday morning calls primitive people from simple farms and humble firesides to gather for simple worship, communion, fraternal intercourse, and subdued gossip.

In the early days the individual was not strong enough to defend himself; the enemy of one was the enemy of all; the wealth, prosperity, wants of the individual; all these were of public concern. Time has not changed the aspect of the stranded New England village, except that there is no common enemy. It is, therefore, Nature's perpetuation of what was bred in the bone that still binds these simple people together with a community interest that knows and permits no secrets: mental, physical and moral possessions are common property—nobody's business and everybody's business; gossip goes as freely, not always as harmlessly, from one end of street to the other, as easily as the weekly paper is borrowed and lent; provisions, tools, labor and experiences are exchanged; and everybody knows everybody else, not in a general way, but in minutest detail.

Curiously enough this does not destroy individuality, it increases it. No settlement in the world, civilized or uncivilized, can show so many individuals with strongly marked characteristics as this New England village on the hills. The characteristics, however, are chiefly physical and moral. Lives and life are so simple that work and conduct are the great factors; thought is the recreation. It is the complex environment that develops the mental side of man. Strife, competition, survival of the fittest, social precedence, political triumph, cultivation of esthetic tastes; all of these, inducing selfish contraction into a personal zone, make man's knowledge of his neighbor a matter of choice rather than necessity. And so, down in the valley by the iron road men know, superficially, many men, but they don't know *man*; it is no longer necessary for mutual protection.

Man's real self is hidden in the congested city. He

herds with some of his fellows through mutual interest in business or pleasure, but Fashion, that unmaker of man, rules, sways, influences, till his manner, speech and appearance, must be like that of other men and his independence forever lost. This happens to the restless, ambitious sons who desert the lonely farms for the alluring fascination of the thicker, congested life of the city where they go to win success. With unformed brain, healthful blood, steady nerves and hardened muscles they strive, compete, fall, rise again, lose and win, with a staying power that makes its mark. In after years, tired of striving, they buy back again the old homestead, refurnish and gild, hoping, usually in vain, to find the old sense of restful peace and simple enjoyment that used to be there. It is not there now, it has gone—from them. The bacilli of an onrushing civilization with its poisonous complexities is in their veins and they cannot, for wishing, recover the fresh nerves and strong young muscles of youth. They have spent their inheritance.

The New England village is slowly, surely dying. It has furnished its quota; sent its young men to the war of National Civilization against the undeveloped resources of a new country. It was the breeding spot for a great nation; but now, the flocks have departed, moved westward, and the old nests are deserted.

Men too old to fight at the front, die, and the quaint old burying ground that opened first for their sturdy ancestors opens to receive them. It will open but few times more, for their sons migrated long ago, fewer of these return from year to year and soon they will forget to come at all. The great wide fireplaces are cold. The nesting swallows desert the eaves and smokeless chimneys to rear their young in the windowless best room now for-

ever open. Larkspur and hollyhock, wild and untrained, linger, faithful to the ruined fortunes of the old home whose crumbling beams, vainly trying to hold its fragments together, cling to the great square chimney that stands, a lonely sentinel, to mark the spot where brave, strong men and tender loving women were born, lived, died, and now are forgotten.

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERY.

SID and the minister preserved a discreet silence concerning the true story of their encounter with the bull, which was more than could be said for the folks up and down The Street. The story that Consider Morton and the new minister had been engaged in personal altercation spread from the village store like flame from a spark in the dry grass of a western prairie. Everybody had a version, some part of which was his or her own, before nightfall, and Sos' Warner had to keep store open an hour later that night. Excitement was at fever heat for some days, and many were the ingenious endeavors made to get Sid's version or the minister's, all of which failed. As usual, folks were divided in opinion; some "guessed that Sid was right"; against those who held that the parson couldn't be wrong, but Sid and the parson held their peace. That same peaceful attitude was a puzzle to The Street. Evidently there wasn't any hard feeling between the minister and Sid; for, in the very midst of the babel of tongues, the parson took dinner at the Morton farm and spent most of the afternoon.

Het' Smith was authority for the statement that "there warn't no trouble 'tween Sid and the minister, for they were like two brothers." But the deacons of the church felt that the matter was one for investigation, and soon convinced themselves that the minister "oughter be disci-

plined." This aspect of the affair was assuming proportion when a new and more absorbing event claimed attention.

Granny White was dead.

Death was, as a rule, too sacred for gossip; it came to the street from time to time and was entertained as a solemn warning to "be prepared," but the death of Granny White was a different matter. Granny White, for years, had been the center of the one mystery that the street had never been able to fathom; all other puzzles had been "guessed" or solved, but nobody had ever been able to "guess" Granny White. Where she came from, or why she chose to live in absolute seclusion, shut up in the big, lonely old house at the farther end of the street, no one knew, except Weasel Clapp, the village lawyer. Twenty odd years before the death of Granny White Weasel had bought the property for somebody and she had come to occupy it, resenting from the first all overtures, friendly or otherwise, shutting herself in from all but the discreet old lawyer. She was wise to trust the lawyer; nothing could be got from Weasel, or "Square," as the folks called him, having a wholesome respect for his attainments and unconsciously feeling that "Square" fitted his character better than Weasel. Measured by standards of shrewdness and honor the village lawyer was both sharp and square, and, if Weasel Clapp knew Granny White's secret, he would not tell it.

It had not always been "Granny" White. That was a name bestowed by children who were curious at first, then frightened, by the queer, half-crazed manner of the strange old woman; "Granny" became the synonym for witch, and her house was said to be haunted. Some could remember from childhood, being driven from her gates,

where from curiosity they had loitered ; but in later years, as the woman grew rapidly old and decrepit, looking more and more witchlike, children avoided that part of the street entirely, or ran past the gates with all speed. Grown folks long ago had ceased to pry into the mystery, though curiosity never abated one whit. Granny White desired to live in complete isolation and alone she lived. The storekeeper and the meat man found their orders in a box attached to the locked gates and left what was wanted in the same place ; she never came to them. She had been to church two or three times in twenty years, otherwise she had never been seen in the street. In the long, hard winters, when the snow frequently piled up to the second story windows, or to the eaves, and "The Street" had to be cleared by oxen, men, and shovels, a path was always made from Granny's door to the gate, but nobody ventured to otherwise disturb her. It came to be a fixed habit of the street to watch in the early evening for light in her windows, or smoke from the chimney in daylight ; these were signs of her wellbeing. If she wanted anything unusual, the doctor, perhaps, she hung from the window a signal which somebody was certain to see, but the lawyer was the only one to go to her assistance—she wished it so. That Granny White had abundant means was generally conceded ; some believed her rich, for, next to Sid Morton, she was most liberal in the support of the church, and when, one particularly hard winter, the weight of snow destroyed the roof and a nearly new church had to be built, it was Granny White who had sent the money, through the lawyer, to do it with.

But Granny White was dead now, and for the first time in more than twenty years the curtains of the old

house were all raised, the windows open, the gates unlocked. The will was to be read by the lawyer, after the funeral, and the mystery would be a mystery no longer.

Everybody in the street went to the funeral, where everybody "wondered how much Granny White was worth and who she'd left it to." There were no mourners; if she had any relatives, they had left her alone in death as they had in life, or, perhaps she had eluded them.

Everybody knew the next day after the funeral that Abigail White, widow, had, by her last will and testament, drawn by the village lawyer and witnessed by Sid Morton and the doctor, left all she possessed—the old house, fifty thousand dollars invested in good securities and some deeds to land somewhere in the Far West, to Faithful Morton, the farmer's adopted daughter. That was all. The mystery was not solved, it was deeper than ever, but Faith Morton had become its center; and the old gossip that had surrounded her mysterious coming into the Morton family was fully revived.

The "hayng time" was on and "folks were dreadful busy." The "anxious seat," as the old settee at the store was called by some irreverant wag, was deserted, for men were in the hayfield early and late, and the women at home had to feed them and help look after the "home chores." So gossip and hard work had to go on together, and, as labor was more important for the welfare of the people, gossip died out a little.

A week after the funeral new matter for speculation came into the street.

"Sol Jackson 'n his wife had got summer boarders from New York; that is—they hadn't come yet but they were coming in a week." The street never had a broader,

in summer or winter, except the new minister, who, not being a married man, had to "board out" of course. Sol Jackson became the center of interest for the moment and speedily told all he knew; "Name was Dunham, father 'n daughter; pootty well fixed, he guessed; comin' for three weeks, mebbe all summer—goin' ter bring two horses, carriages 'n a dog cart, though what they could do with a dog cart he'd be blamed 'f he could see—never heerd of one afore." But coming they were, and Sol at once proceeded to "let his haying out to halves"; that is, he was to get half of the cured hay, somebody else to do the work for the other half. Sol had to "paper, paint, and fix up scrumptious"; he had no time for haying. The Street envied Sol, but couldn't see "what 'n time anybody wanted to come on 't the hills for ter board; course, they knew their own business, but 'twas mighty lucky for Sol."

The boarders came; with trunks and boxes innumerable; with a pair of highly-bred horses, carriages, and the dog cart which had excited curiosity, but which, after all, was to be drawn by a horse.

Mark Dunham was a solidly built man of fifty or thereabouts, with close trimmed gray hair and side whiskers—evidently prosperous and well furnished. He might be a banker or successful city merchant; not of the conservative type, for his well-fitted clothing was a bit too expensive and rather too conspicuous; then, too, the thick lips and high color in his face suggested a man inclined to be sensual and pleasure-loving rather than one habitually absorbed in business.

Rose Dunham, the daughter, was a full-blown illustration of her first name. Physically considered Rose Dunham and her father were perfect specimens of well-fed,

well-groomed humanity. Sos' Warner "guessed that the city boarders didn't come all the way from New York for their health," and Warner was right.

The day they arrived Dunham sought out the village lawyer and for two hours was shut in with "Square" Clapp and the yellow old papers in musty boxes that held the lawyer's secrets. It could not have been a friendly call, for "The Street" watched Mr. Dunham and "Square" every time they met afterwards and they discovered that the lawyer didn't speak to Dunham if he could help it. "Suthin' was up—sure!" and folks guessed that this was "goin' ter be the liveliest summer the street had ever seen."

Meanwhile the minister had taken Sid's advice, and was preaching what the street called "mighty powerful sermons," not, however, upon the plan suggested by Sid, who, really, had not meant all he said about hell fire and damnation. Sid and the minister had talked that subject all over again and decided that what "The Street" wanted most was a revival of the Golden Rule and a little more brotherly love; something that folks could take into the fields with them every week day; something they could live as well as die by. The minister was getting so far into the hearts of the people that some began to think the parson couldn't do better than to pick out a wife and settle down; which meant that ere long there would be rival factions, each with a candidate picked out for the minister's wife, pitted against each other, industriously trying to catch the parson with a matrimonial halter.

The minister had talked with Joe, and found the handsome, sturdy young fellow longing for life on a higher social level than the hill farmers could afford or conceive. There was no special calling or profession that

Joe wanted to follow. He was willing to let that be decided by the tide of battle; but he wanted the battle first, wanted to test his strength. As the minister looked at Joe he thought of the bull, and wondered how hard and how far Joe would run if the ties that bound him to the farm were loosened. If this young bull were to break away from the conventions that he hated, and, after leaping hurdles, dodging obstacles or surmounting them, could be safely trusted to escape pitfalls and the mire, and at last come back tamed and satisfied—but that was doubtful.

The minister did not succeed in changing Joe's mind. He found the young fellow saturated with dislike for the narrowness of people and things around him, and to some extent felt that Joe was right. Aside from this, Joe's desires were rather badly defined; a nebulous yearning for an indefinite something out of his reach made the minister less inclined to sympathize with Joe's ambitions. The more the minister thought of it the surer he became that this was a situation that must solve itself. If Joe loved the girl, Faith, he would sooner or later marry her, and Granny White's legacy would make them independent. So the minister gave up trying to convince Joe.

CHAPTER IV.

IF JOE LOVED FAITH.

THE Morton farm, like the Morton family, stood a little apart from the street. It stood on lower and better land. The up-street farmers said with some truth that when it rained all the good in the higher land washed down on to the Morton place. It certainly was less exposed in winter and less liable to suffer in the long dry spells that in summer burned up the crops on higher land.

Down at the end of a long lane, shaded on either side by giant sugar maples locking their leafy arms like the segments of a cathedral arch over head, stood the quaint old house, silver gray with honorable age; the house that had seen a hundred years come and go.

The broad roof sloping away from the great stone chimney in the center till a tall man might touch the mossy eaves with his hand; the low front door, with scarce room for fanlight over it, half hidden by the gnarled and twisted lilac trees that spread their strong arms above the eaves and in the flowering time laid their perfumed clusters on the roof itself; the windows hiding behind the tall hollyhocks; the path from lane to door banked on either side with peonies, larkspur, lichidæ, sweet-William, clove pink, marigolds, and tiger lilies; the Lombardy poplars lifting their green spires high in the air; the gate posts scarlet crowned with potted nasturtiums sending their round leaved runners dangling down

to kiss the ground; this was Morton Farm. The house, the attendant barns, sheds for tools, cribs for corn, yards for cattle, stacks of hay and straw that couldn't be put inside, made a picturesque little village by itself. One of the tall maples had apparently strayed in from the lane and planted itself in the yard, halfway between the house and the outbuildings, and spread its protecting branches from one to the others. Around the bole of this tree there was a broad seat from which the eye would wander gently down the sloping fields, rich with promise, to the fertile meadows, the winding river, the iron road in the valley below, the dark woodlands beyond, and lose itself in the blue mists of the Connecticut Vale.

Other farms might be running out, but this one was not. Everywhere around the Morton place there was evidence of vital growth and thrift, and all around was the peacefulness that should bring wholesome contentment. The distant rumble of a passing train in the valley below might bring, for a moment, a thought of the strife and competition that congested in towns and cities, but it died almost before it was born, and was transformed into the twitter of swallows, the smell of roses, and the trickle of cool spring water that fell from wooden spout to trough.

There were two spots dearer than all the rest of this to the farmer—yet both were a part of it; one was the last earthly resting place of those who had gone before; father, mother and wife—Joe's mother—simple stones marked where they rested under the cool shadow of the trees and flowers, waiting till loved ones could come to them again. But the other spot that Morton loved was half prepared for the living. It was the foundation for another house. Years ago the first stones were cut and laid, with little Joe and baby Faith playing together and

prattling to the big, strong armed Sid, as he piled one heavy stone upon another.

Later, as they all grew older, Joe, too, had helped to lay the foundations for the new house that was to be his and Faith's. The farmer and his wife had dreamed by night and planned by day for this. God had mysteriously sent into their keeping this golden-haired, blue-eyed angel, who, with sunny smile and dainty clinging hands, had tangled their heart strings from the first.

They had loved Faith as one of them, and Joe had loved her in his frank boyish way; loved, protected, slaved, fought for her, through all the toils, jealousies and hardships of childhood; loved her till both grew old enough to know what love must mean, and then——

And all the time the farmer and his wife dreamed on and planned that Faith, and Joe, too, might never leave them. Then came a time when the sturdy, sorrowing old man must dream and plan alone, which he never ceased to do—till now, Joe was a man and Faith a sweet, tender woman, and it was time to build the house——

If Joe loved Faith.

CHAPTER V.

"HIRED HELP."

A DAY or two more would finish the haying season, which hadn't gone well at the Morton farm; "too many spells 'er weather," Sid said, by which he meant that there were too many days without sunshine. But there were other reasons why the haying hadn't gone well. Joe's lack of interest was a bad example to everybody in the field. It was contagious, and affected Sid himself. "Haying at Sid's" was usually looked upon as a sort of annual festival, for which Sid easily had his "pick of the hired help" from The Street, and the meadow at Morton Farm became an arena where records were won and lost. In the early morning strong armed mowers raced with keen edged scythes from gate to wood, piling up the sweet herdsgrass in long straight swaths, with never a stop from end to end; then, just long enough to "whet up" under the cool of the trees, "turn corners," and race back again. The man to keep up with Sid must be a good one, but not one in the field this summer that couldn't "rake his heels"; and so things went badly.

"Joe was worse 'n nothin'," while Medad Hill and Stuttering Sim, the helpers, had their own subject for constant bickering and quarreled. This subject was Miss Mehitable Smith—"Het," for short—who helped up at the house.

The situation that involved Joe and his father was not

improving. Sid felt that it was getting worse from day to day without just knowing why. It began to dawn upon him that something was wrong between Joe and Faith—no wonder the work went slowly.

Things were not much better up at the farmhouse. Abby, Sid's old maid sister, who ruled the house with a hand of iron, was on edge, and "when things go wrong with Ab' Morton folks must stan' 'round," so people said in The Street.

Abigail Morton was tall, spare of figure, sharp in face and quick of tongue, but there wasn't a lazy bone in her body, and she could get work "out of her way and done up" in less time than most folks would spend thinking about it; that is the way folks in The Street would have described her. But the day had been unusually hot and stifling, and somehow the work had got ahead of Abigail; judging from the sound of moving kitchen utensils in the house Abby was on edge.

"Hetty! Hetty Smith! Ain't ye never goin' ter git that pail 'er water?" It was Abby's voice in the house.

"Yes, marm," drawled Hetty. Nothing on earth could hasten Hetty, who was the living opposite to Abby Morton. Hetty was short, round as a dumpling, slow of movement and speech. "Slower 'n m'lasses in winter" Sid said.

"Land sakes alive! What's hired help good for, I'd like ter know! How d 'ye expect I'm goin' ter git supper for hungry hay folks all 'lone? Gi'me that water, quick!" Abby couldn't be seen, but she was easily heard, and there was an unmistakable odor, splutter and sizzle of frying doughnuts that betrayed Abby's occupation in the house.

"Yes, marm," drawled Hetty again, but without mov-

ing from the cool seat under the big maple, the empty pail at her feet, and her eyes watching the winding road to the meadows.

"Yes, marm!" drawled Abby with close imitation. "Wal, hurry up!" But Hetty was not listening to Abby now; she could hear Medad coming up the road humming "Greenfield" as he came. She waited for Medad and Abby waited for the water.

"Gosh! Hetty, ain't it hot!" said Medad, as he sent the mossy, iron banded bucket that hung from the tall sweep, clattering down into the cool depths of the old well.

"Gracious! Mr. Hill's that you?" simpered the girl.

"Glong! 's if ye didn't know!" said Medad, with admiring grin that faded when Hetty uttered the next question.

"Ain't Sim comin' up putty soon?" she asked.

"Sim be darned! I'll mow his legs off the next time I ketch 'im 'n my swath!" declared Medad, with quavering voice, for Medad was angry. But Hetty was in no wise disturbed.

"Wal," said she, "you'll have ter git up early in the mornin'! Uncle Sid says Sim's the smartest hand in the field."

"That settles it, I 'spose! 'F you think more 've Sim 'n ye do of me, we might 's well break off right now!" This threat involved some clever presumption; Hetty had never definitely acknowledged him as a suitor.

"Didn't say that," she replied after a pause.

"Hetty, be yer goin' ter git that water!" again came from the kitchen.

"Now, Hetty, what's the use 've beat'n 'bout the bush?" continued Medad, getting Hetty's empty pail and filling it at the well; "I've got a chance ter take the Jones farm

t' halves, 'n 't kinder seems ter me we've been keepin' compn'y long 'nough t' know our own minds, 'n 'f ye say so, I'll drive over there t' night 'n strike up a dicker."

Hetty didn't have a chance to "say so," for the angry Abigail flew out of the kitchen door with an empty milk pail in her hand.

"If ye want anythin' 'n this world git it yerself!" said she, with emphasis; then, seeing Medad and the situation she uttered a short, crisp "Oh! Medad—don't they want ye down 'n the hay field?"

"Wal—ye see, Miss Abby," said Medad, transferring the water from Hetty's pail to Abby's, "Sid sent me up ahead 'er the rest ter water the stock 'n do the chores."

"Wal, ye can't do yer sparkin' 'n water the critters too! Can't ye wait t'l Sunday night?"

Sunday night was devoted to what Abby called "Sparkin'," in every New England street.

"Oh, Miss Morton—Sto-op!" simpered Hetty.

"There! That 'll do now!" said Abby. "You're worse 'n he is. I snum 'f them doughnuts ain't burnin'! Run in 'n tend to 'em. Here! Take the water!" Hetty had no choice but to go without giving answer to Medad. Abby wanted a word or two with Medad which she didn't care to have Hetty hear.

"When 'er Jackson's boarders goin' ter leave, Medad?" she asked.

"That's suthin' nobody seems able ter find out, Miss Abby. Purty close mouthed them Dunhams, that's a fact. Guess they're goin' ter stay all summer," said Medad.

"Humph!" This was an ejaculation full of profound contempt. Medad waited, but Abby did not seem disposed to explain it.

"Why?" asked Medad, curiosity prevailing.

"Joe Morton spends a good deal 'er time up street lately, don't he?" When the New Englander asks a question it generally contains information. Medad knew what Abby meant now.

"Ain't nothin' the matter 'tween Joe 'n Faith, is there?" was Medad's question.

"Wal, Joe allus did like a piney better 'n a buttercup, but that ain't neither here nor there," said Abby, sententiously.

"Smart gal, Rose Dunham, I guess," returned Medad.

"She's a stuck up hussy in red! I know!" said Abby, remembering the sensation Rose had created last Sunday in a gown that would have been called a scarlet confection in New York or Paris, and which had received more attention than the sermon.

"I was tellin' ye' brother t' day, Joe hain't been himself lately"—— began Medad, but Abby interrupted.

"Wal, tain't fish 'er my fryin'! Sid 'll never git over it if Joe's Faith don't make a match on 't. It's allus the way, though, 'f ye git ter plannin' fer other folks. Ye never k'n tell how colts er' goin' ter turn out. One thing 's sure! Joe Morton ain't satisfied ter be a good farmer," said Abby.

"Wal, there ain't much money in it, that's a fact," said Medad. "That needn't worry Joe much, now 't Granny White's left all her money ter Faith. Curious, warn't it?"

"She might 'er done worse; though I never did bleev' 'n try'n ter put a silver spoon in a mouth that was born for a pewter one! But there ain't no better girl than Faith, if she is an orphan."

"Miss Abigail, sh'll I blow the horn?" said Hetty, taking that implement from its peg by the kitchen door.

"Good gracious!" said Abby, "here I be, forgettin' all 'bout supper 'n Sid won't wanter wait a minit. Hurry up, Hetty! Go 'n see if you k'n find Faith—she went over 't the woods more 'n an hour ago ter git some berries. Poor thing! She's been down the mouth lately—'F I don't give Joe Morton a piece 'er my mind"—the remainder of Abby's sentence was lost inside the house.

Hetty made two or three futile endeavors to get sound from the long tin dinner horn.

"Spos'n ye let me do that—you can't make 'em hear—wind's wrong way," said Medad, slowly takin' in a great lung full of air; then blowing a blast that sent all the doves out of the cote at the end of the shed and set the hens to cackling. When the echoes had died away, there came up from somewhere on the meadow the voice of the farmer in a long faint "Hal—o-o-o-o!"

"They're comin' with the last load. Gosh! I must hurry up 'n git them critters watered, Sid 'll be tearin' 'f I don't! Say! Don't s'pose you'll be ter home Sunday night?" said Medad. Hetty was pretending great interest in the flower beds.

"Hain't thought much 'bout it," said she, plucking a sprig of geranium, "but if ye hain't got anythin' else ter do, ye might come 'round a little while." Whether Hetty intended to give the sprig of geranium to Medad was not clear, for, with the clumsy, awkward playfulness of a big animal Medad seized her by the arms and after some pretended struggle on both sides he took the flower from her. Hetty made a bashful protest and ran into the house. Medad, with the air of conqueror, took from his hip-pocket his well-worn old leather wallet, laid the

blossoms carefully between the flattened papers, strapped it securely and returned it to the pocket. Then he gathered the milking pails, and literally humming with satisfaction, went to the well for more water. But Medad was reckoning without thought of his rival in Hetty's affections.

Stuttering Sim had seen from the gates the forced capture of the flower. Throwing his coat over the gate and dropping his pitchfork, he came to the well, vainly struggling to speak. When Sim was angry his infirmity was at the worst. It was always easier to say the thing he didn't particularly wish to say; by so doing he could usually get the right words started.

"G—g—g—give us a drink!" said Sim, glaring at Medad, who emptied the bucket into a pail.

"Why don't ye help yerself? You k'n draw a bucketful quicker 'n you k'n ask for it," said Medad coolly. But Sim was started now—he didn't want water.

"Mm-m—mighty—c-c-c-cute—ain't ye!" said Sim with muscles twitching.

"Wal I make out ter be!" said Medad. "I'm jes' cute 'nough ter know 't you've got ter stop shine'n up ter Het' Smith!"

Hetty could be heard in the house, placing the supper dishes on the table and unconsciously murmuring the same song that Medad was singing when Sim interrupted. The two belligerents faced each other in threatening attitudes; one tall and loose-jointed the other short but wiry, both angry.

"Who—who—s-s-says so?" hissed Sim.

"Gol darn it! I say so," replied Medad.

"F—f-f-free country, ain't it?" said Sim.

"Tain't so darned free 's you think," said Medad; "'n you'll find it out 'f ye don't keep off 'n my doorstep!"

"Wh—what ye g-g-g-oin' ter—d-d-d-do 'bout it?" asked Sim, getting closer.

"What 'm I goin' ter do 'bout it—why darn yer sassy pichter! You stop it 'er I'll"—and Medad advanced.

"W—w-wal!" Sim's voice trembled with anger.

"Wal!" So did Medad's. "You quit yer foolin' or I'll tan yer hide for yer."

"I g—g-g-guess not!" said Sim.

"I g—g-g-guess yes!" said Medad, mockingly.

Meanwhile Sid was almost home with the last load for the day. He could be heard, begging, wheedling, coaxing, almost swearing at the lazy oxen, who minded little as they dragged the cart, piled high with hay, up the hill. Even Sid was out of temper. "Who'o'ap! Whoa! Whoa there! There g'long now—Who'p—Gee! Gee! Confound ye—can't ye gee when I tell ye?" the farmer was saying in the distance.

"W—w-wal! Wh—wh-why d—d-don't ye d—do it—now?" Sim was asking, in the foreground.

"Wal!"

"Wal!"

"Wal!" The attitude of threat was strained almost to breaking point by the time the farmer gee'd and haw'd his load to the barn and entered the yard, hot and tired. "Confound it! What's got inter everythin' 'n everybody! Now you're by the ears, eh? Ain't ye 'shamed er yerselves? Sim, go 'n back the load in 't the barn 'n throw it off in the mornin'. Then shin over 'n git the cows. Got the chores most done, Medad?"

"Wal—no—can't do nothin' when Sim's 'round," said Medad, sheepishly.

"Ain't neither on ye worth a hill er beans when there's a gal around. Great guns! You're worse 'n Joe ter git along with. Darned if I don't think there's suthin' 'n the air this summer."

Sid was just about half right. There was more in the air than he suspected. He knew that Joe was becoming more and more discontented day by day, and he felt that a crisis was near. He had even gone so far as to seriously weigh the parson's advice, and had almost persuaded himself that he could say "God bless you, Joe, go and follow your ambition." But Sid did not know that the Dunhams had taken a great fancy to Joe and were giving that which was more welcome to him than anything else in the world just now, sympathy. But Sid knew that when the crisis came, either Joe or he, one of them, must give up what he thought was right, and Sid wanted to be generous to the boy. Sid sat in the cool shadow of the maple and thought it all over again for the hundredth time to-day; thought of that and forgot all else till Abby lost patience and came out to seek him.

"Oh! there ye be; ain't ye never comin' in ter supper? Where's Medad, hain't he done milkin' yet? Heat's soured every bit in the house. Does beat all how things 've gone to-day, nothin' goes right! Faith's been out trapesin' through the woods all the arternoon, 'n Hetty ain't no more use 'n a settin' hen!" said Abby.

"Kinder seems ter me you're outer sorts yerself, Abby," said Sid gently.

"Wal, I am, that's a fact, but everythin's gone outer kilter somehow." Abby always calmed down a bit when Sid talked to her.

"What 'pears ter be the matter?" Sid asked.

"I'm worried 'bout Faith," said Abby.

"Ye mean Joe," said the farmer.

"No, I don't mean Joe! Joe's a man 'n he k'n take care 've himself, but Faith can't, 'n 'ts my 'pinion she's breakin' her heart."

"Abby! ye don't mean that!" Sid was startled, he had given all his thought to Joe. "Ye don't mean it's gone so far as that?"

"That's just what I do mean, 'n suthin's got ter 'be done, sure 's I'm your sister! What's got inter Joe, anyway?"

"Good Lord! I don't know. He don't seem satisfied with nothin' lately. Joe's stubborn 's a mule 'n when he gits his mind sot on anythin' he'll stick. 'Tain't no use t' argue with him," replied the farmer.

"Wal, there's suthin' wrong 'tween Joe 'n Faith, 'n 'f you don't give him a talkin' to, *I* shall." Abby was determined.

"Mebbe 'tain't 's bad 's ye think, Abby," said Sid. "Le's hope so anyway. It'd go kinder hard with me 'f Faith shouldn't marry Joe. I've looked for'ard ter that ever since his mother died. 'N 'twas her last wish, too. I tell ye if Joe don't stick ter Faith I don't care how quick things go t' the dogs!"

"Things 'll be all right soon 's Jackson's boarders go back 't the city," asserted Abby.

"What d'ye mean by that?"

"Oh, nothin'"—— but Abby did mean a great deal without much foundation; she had been listening to Hetty's gossip. "Them Dunhams er fillin' Joe up with new-fangled notions."

Sid was getting new light.

"Humph!" Abby evidently had more to say. "She

ain't no better 'n she oughter be, 'f her dad is a bank president!"

"Wal—mebbe. We shouldn't judge"— Sid began, but Abby continued.

"Just mark my words 'n see 'f it don't turn out 's I say. She's been settin' her cap for Joe ever since they got here."

"I don't b'leeve it!" said Sid after a pause.

"Wal, that's what folks say!" snapped Abby.

"I know 't Joe's got all wrong somehow, 'n I don't know what ter do, I vow I don't! We can't interfere much 'n young folks' ways, now-a-days, but I'd give half the farm ter see this straightened out. Ye can't blame Joe for being ambitious, but ye mustn't b'leeve all ye hear," said the farmer.

"Betsey's shrunk more'n a quart—er else she's holdin' up her milk," said Medad, coming from the barn with pails of foaming milk. "Ye 'll have ter turn her for beef 'n the spring."

"Hain't seen Joe, have ye, Medad?" asked the farmer, impressed by Abby's opinion in spite of himself.

"Saw him an hour ago," said Medad, "walkin' up the road with that Dunham gal. Guess *he's* all right."

The farmer resolved to have one more talk with Joe; this time heart to heart.

CHAPTER VI.

JOE TALKS TO HIS FATHER.

THE people of The Street now had their own and everybody's opinion of affairs at the Morton Farm; but nobody knew what Joe and Faith thought. Neither of these two, who had most at stake, were given to the bestowal of confidence concerning matters that were so essentially personal to them.

Joe knew, and, presumably, so did Faith, most of the gossip that had circulated concerning the reasons that induced Sid to lay the foundations for a new house, but he didn't care. It hurt Faith, this gossip, it was cruel; she was not to blame for not knowing her own father, mother, not even her own name, but the neighbors and the children of neighbors had many a time sent her flying home in tears with their thoughtless gibes.

Joe cared not one whit what folks said, for himself. He had licked every boy in the village who had dared to "say things," licked them for Faith's sake, but he couldn't lick the girls, nor could he stop the talk. This childish persecution had isolated Faith by her own choice, had brought her and Joe closer together in the years of their childhood, and helped to convince the farmer that "Joe 'n Faith never could get along without each other."

Joe had never been quite like other boys of the community; he was not so generally susceptible to feminine influence as they. He had kissed every girl in the village—

who hadn't. The only games of chance ever indulged in by both sexes were games that revolved around a kiss: every sleigh ride, every surprise party, every school recess, the annual donation party to the minister, every gathering that brought the sexes together had it for a basis; but unlike other lads on the verge of manhood, Joe was never upset by it. They kissed and fell in love, the early, feverish calf love of youth, fell in and out a dozen times a year, with never a serious intention; it was a part of their legitimate amusement. Heaven bless their young souls, there was never a harm in it, for it was as pure and chaste as the winter snow, but, like the winter snow, never lasted till spring. Nobody could say that Joe Morton had ever "kept company" with any girls of the village; not through any fault of theirs, they were willing enough, but Joe was not to be caught; and Joe was the best looking fellow in the village. Faith wasn't liked any better because Joe was heart-proof so far as others were concerned, and, apparently, devoted to her alone. Joe had never said to Faith that he loved her; it isn't always necessary. What Joe would have said to Faith, or confessed to himself, if the ever-present plan to unite them some day were not always in evidence is not certain. There is a natural rebellion against authority in every human being; never stronger than in affairs of the heart. This capacity for resistance grew with Joe's years; as he became old enough to think seriously of things it appeared that he was not free to choose anything for himself. This feeling grew in a latent sort of way, till now any trivial motive, some sudden nagging like the dog's playful attack on the bull, was likely to precipitate an outburst. The bull was not vicious; no more was Joe, but

his young strength was ripe and he was full of unconscious desire to use it.

The impetus that might start an avalanche came shortly after Granny White's will was read; the will that left everything to Faith. The gossips found a new theme; believed that the shrewd farmer had known all along that Faith was to be the heir, and had thriftily planned the union between Joe and Faith to keep the money in the family. This was false, for Sid had never spoken of Faith to Granny White. Sid knew it was false and didn't mind the chatter, but Joe was deeply stung by the suggestion that he could seemingly consent to marry Faith for mercenary motives. He hated the thought and he despised the people who uttered it; he hated the narrow surroundings that made the idle gossip possible, and he resolved to get away from it all, with his father's consent if possible. He must get out into the world, where there were larger opportunities. Faith was rich now; he must make his own fortune. If the minister could have talked with Joe again he probably would have discovered that Joe's nebulous desires were taking form; that deep down in his secret heart Joe loved Faith, and that the greatest factor in the future of these two would be Joe's desire for independence.

Sid did not wait many days before acting upon Abby's advice to "give Joe a piece of his mind." Joe was twenty-one, Faith was nineteen; they were old enough to marry and settle down—in the old house—till the new one could be built. That would stop the gossip and the worry; that would end Joe's restlessness. Besides, if people were beginning to talk about Joe and these Dunhams something must be done, for Faith's sake; it would pain her. Sid didn't know anything against the Dun-

hams," but he didn't like them; perhaps he feared Rose Dunham's influence upon Joe, knowing as well as Abby that Joe was rather fond of showy exteriors; so Sid watched for a favorable opportunity to speak to Joe, while Joe, with the same mind, but with motives of his own, resolved to speak at once to his father. They came together under the old maple.

"Joe"——

"Wal"——

"Come here 'n set down for a minute," said the farmer, "I wanter have a talk with ye." But Joe was too young and restless to sit calmly down to discuss the subject that lay between them.

"What's the use of talking, father, I know what you are going to say—and you know how I feel. I'm sick of it! I'm sick of the people, I'm sick of the place and everything in it!" said Joe.

"Joe!"

"You know what I mean; I don't mean you, nor Aunt Abby. I don't mean—Faith; it's the others—the cackling old hens! do you know what they're saying now?"

"Ye mean 'bout the money? or"——

"Yes, I mean about the money," said Joe. "And the worst of it is, that this time they're right."

"Tain't none 'er their business."

"It is true just the same, and it is my business. Do you think I'm going to have it thrown in my face that I married a girl for her money? I'd die first"——

"Faith don't need it."

"Well—I don't need it; not that I don't want money and what it'll buy—I do! And I'll have it some day, but it's got to be mine because I earned it"——

"Joe, the day you 'n Faith are made one I'll give ye a

deed to this farm, land, buildings, stock 'n everything," said the farmer earnestly.

"Wal if I took it, I'd be worse than folks say I am; as bad as marrying Faith for her money," said Joe, hotly. "But I won't give them a chance, I'm sick of the whole place and I'm going to leave it."

"Joe! Ye don't mean—ye don't mean that, Joe!" said the farmer, brokenly.

"I do mean it, every word," said Joe. "It's as stagnant as that old lily pond over there by the woods. It's a wonder there's ever wind enough to ripple it. I've wished a hundred times that I was at the bottom of it, but that was when there was no hope of ever getting away from feeding cows and digging dirt—now, it's different!"

"Yes, Joe, it *is* different; seems as if everything was goin' to pieces, all ter once. Joe, all my life I've asked the good Lord who watches over us, ter put the right words inter my mouth ter say to ye. I've tried ter do my duty by ye. Mebbe 'twas all wrong ter plan for ye, but yer mother 'n I thought that when we got old 'n not quite so hearty 's we might be—wal—there'd be Joe 'n Faith. The last words she said ter me was: 'There'll be Joe and Faith'—'n now, just because the Lord put it inter an old woman's head ter die 'n leave all her money ter Faith, the place ye was born 'n raised in ain't good 'nough for ye, 'n darn me! 'f ye was just a leetle smaller I'd thrash it outer ye mighty quick!" The first part of the old man's declaration was full of tender pathos, but by the time he had ended he was nearer anger than Joe had ever seen him; Joe had no thought of resentment though, he was too deeply in earnest himself.

"You don't understand me, father, what *should* I do?" asked Joe.

"Do? Do! Roll up yer sleeves 'n go ter work. Build a grist-mill over t' the river. Guess we k'n raise the money. Do! Don't spend yer time lookin' at the clouds 'n wishin'. Make the land 'round here raise twice as much t' the acre. Drain that old sink 've a south medder; I'll bet t'll raise ten ton'er hay t' the acre. Do! Build the new house for you 'n Faith, the foundation's done. Make it bigger 'f ye ain't satisfied. Lord! Lord! Lord! There's enough ter do!"

"That wouldn't satisfy me," said Joe, "I don't want you to think me ungrateful for all that you've done for me because I can't see things as you do, father."

"Don't be in a hurry, take time 'n think it over, Joe."

"I have taken time and I've thought it all over for two years; but every day brings some new reason why I should go"—

"Go—where 'n for what? That's what I'd like ter know," said the farmer.

"Out into the world, to begin for myself," said Joe quietly.

"New York!" There was a volume of contempt in the farmer's voice; he had been in New York once in his life—for a few hours.

"Yes, New York," said Joe, who had never seen the city.

"Wal," said Sid, "I've ben there 'n I know; there's more beginners ter the acre 'n there is stalks er herdsgrass on an acre 've our best medder."

"And more opportunities," said Joe, confidently.

"'N ye've made up yer mind ter go?" asked Sid.

"I want your full consent, father," said Joe, evading the question.

"That's jest what I can't give," said Sid, Joe's quiet and persistent opposition arousing all his obstinacy.

"Well, I've got my chance and I mean to make the most of it," said Joe.

"Chance, what d' you mean by that?" asked Sid.

"Mr. Dunham has offered me a place in his business. There's the \$2,000 that mother left me. Mr. Dunham says that's enough to start on," said Joe.

"Oh!—That's it,"—Sid's heart froze within him.

"Mr. Dunham says he's coming here to talk it over with you," continued Joe.

"Wal, what must be will be," said the farmer after a moment of silence, "and we've got ter put up with it, whether we like it 'er not. Joe, I'll be reconciled ter anythin' ye undertake if ye'll promise me one thing; don't hurt Faith; promise that ye'll talk ter her—'n have an understandin' with her, will ye?"

"Yes," said Joe, hesitating a little.

"Then God prosper ye and I'll help ye all I can; we've ben a leetle worried, Abby 'n me—but there! It's all right—Go 'n find Faith 'n tell her it's all right, 'n ye'll take a big load off 'n my mind." Then Sid sought out Abby, told her of his talk with Joe, and actually tried, against his own instincts, to convince her that all was for the best, to all of which Abby's only reply was: "Humph!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE VILLAGE LAWYER.

EXCEPT, perhaps, the minister, the most universally respected individual in The Street was Weasel Clapp, the village lawyer, or "Square" Clapp, as the people called him, because they respected, trusted, and honored him. Politically, "Square" Clapp was the town, for he held every office that demanded integrity, judgment and responsibility. He was head selectman, town treasurer, the entire school committee, and the most generally trusted man in the county, of which "The Street" was a small part. In all difference of opinion that was beyond settlement at the village store "Square's" word was law. When folks got "by the ears," as they frequently did, over transfer of deeds, boundary lines, the price of a cow, damage to sheep from unruly dogs, and a thousand other happenings, "Square" was at once appealed to by both sides. The case never went to court, for the shrewd lawyer had a happy faculty of "keeping disagreements in the family," as he expressed it, and was usually able to settle the case for both parties in his friendly way. People of the street guessed that the lawyer had saved them a good deal of money, first and last. Better still, nothing ever leaked out of Weasel's musty little office. He never talked; and so "tell yer troubles ter 'Square,'" had become almost a proverb in the street, and the green wooden

boxes on Weasel's high shelves hid many a bit of secret history.

The lawyer had other honors thrust upon him, beyond the power of The Street to confer. "Down at the center," by which was meant the county seat or shire town. "Square" was director of a bank, and widely respected for his shrewd instinct and fine legal acquirements. His services were much sought, and when he consented to take sides in a cause it was considered as good as won. Higher honors than these the lawyer had persistently refused. He wouldn't go to legislature. For thirty years he had lived in The Street and he expected to live there for the rest of his life; said "he wanted to stay where he could do the most good."

"Square's" office should have been the "spare room" in his lonely house if he had been a family man, but the lawyer had never been married. People guessed that the lawyer loved his books and boxes too much to think of anything else; and so the Squire was looked upon as a confirmed old bachelor of fifty-five, in easy circumstances.

Once or twice Sid had thought of talking things over with Weasel, but never could quite make up his mind to do so. After all, it was a family matter, and why should he go to anybody else with it. Sid wasn't the man to feel that he needed any judgment but his own; besides, "family matters allus oughter be settled 't home," Sid thought. But Sid was mistaken this time, and the village lawyer was destined to be an important factor in Sid's family affairs, particularly this one that so deeply concerned the happiness of Joe and Faith. The lawyer knew this, had known it for some time, but he hated to give up one of the secrets that for years had been carefully hidden away in his safe. He had heard the gossip about Faith's mys-

terious coming to the Mortons, about Joe's restless ambitions, about the bequest to Faith and the farmer's alleged motives, about the Dunhams and Joe, and he had held a discreet silence; but now, he must, to help Sid—and Joe, and Faith—reveal a secret that would make a bonfire of gossip. And so, one afternoon shortly after Joe's final declaration to his father the lawyer carefully locked his dingy office and turned thoughtfully down the cool lane under the maple arches to find Consider Morton.

Sid was in the yard, tinkering up the well curb a little. He had a hearty greeting for the Squire.

"Evenin', Square, how be ye? How's everythin' up your way? Folks all well, I s'pose?" This was not a personal inquiry, it was an expression of general curiosity about the health of The Street.

"Thank ye, everything is about as people make it; same way everywhere, I guess," was Weasel's reply, in his dry, shrewd voice.

"S'pose ye hain't been ter supper, have ye?" said Sid. "Stop 'n have a bite with us, I'll go 'n tell the wimmen folks to put on a plate for ye. Come in, Square, come in!"

The lawyer was leaning over the gate and appeared to be estimating the value of the house, barns, stock, and land that was known as the "Morton place."

"Wal—fact is—I came over to have a talk with *you*, Sid," said the lawyer, coming in and seating himself under the tree."

"I wanter know!" said Sid, with unmistakable surprise in his tone. When the Squire wanted to talk there was something important to be said, and Sid wondered if he had forgotten to take up a note, if that bull had broken loose, or if that pesky dog had been worrying somebody's

sheep again. Sid waited patiently for the Squire to begin.

"Nice place you've got here," said the Squire.

"Pooty good condition, Square, if I *do* say it," said Sid with pardonable pride.

"Mortgaged?" asked the lawyer.

"No siree! Not by a long chalk! When *I* leave it, Joe 'n Faith 'll have it clear. 'F I had my way, they'd have it sooner 'n that," said the farmer, thinking of his proposition that Joe had refused.

"Joe and Faith, eh?" said the Squire, thoughtfully.

"Ye'up! That's the way we've allus planned," said the farmer.

"Your place must be worth five or six thousand dollars, Sid," said the Squire.

"Wal, I d' know 'bout that, I've never wanted ter sell it," said the farmer.

"I hear Joe wants to go away," said the Squire.

"Ye'up—New York, confound it! Joe's taken the bit in his teeth 'n I guess *I* can't hold him," said Sid, driving the last nail into the curb and sitting by the Squire under the tree. "I thought I was strong enough to break him t' harness, but I ain't."

"Smart boy, Joe," said the Squire.

"Hain't never been away f'm home but twice 'n his life," said Sid, following his own thoughts, "went over t' Conway Academy two winters runnin', then he came home every Sat'day night; but ter have him go 'way f' good—Square, it's like buryin' him!"

"Don't think ye ought to take it that way, exactly," said the lawyer. "It's always the way with the farmer's boy who has anything in him; he wants to flap his wings and crow."

"Wal, ain't there room enough on the farm?"

"It isn't room that he wants," said the Squire. "He wants something to crow about. He wants to be where the fight is thickest. That's why he goes to the city. Sometimes he succeeds and sometimes he gets most awfully licked."

"Then what becomes of him," asked Sid.

"Well, that depends upon what kind of stuff he's made of! Sometimes he goes to the dogs, sometimes—not very often though—he comes back to the country and settles down where he can do the most good," said the lawyer, with a curious tone in his voice that sounded as though he was telling his own story.

"When is Joe going?"

"'Tain't settled yet. I had some hopes 'er bein' able ter talk him out of it, but 'long comes that man Dunham from New York and offers Joe a place. That settled it! No use 'n talkin' after that!" said Sid, dejectedly.

"Oh!—Dunham did that, did he?" said Weasel, sharply, his thin lips drawn tightly, his eyes half closed, and thinking hard.

"Ye'up! S'pose I oughter be grateful for Joe's sake, but I ain't. I don't like Dunham," and Sid flattened a tiny ant-hill with his great cowhide boot. Weasel saw the action and smiled.

"Sid," said Weasel, "have you ever tried to find Faith's father and mother?"

"Lord, no!" said Sid. "I didn't wanter find 'em. I was afraid to; we found the little mite in a basket on that doorstep one cold morning 'fore sun-up; we took 'er inter the house 'n warmed 'er 'n fed 'er; we didn't know who she b'longed to, 'n we didn't care. Seemed 's if God'mighty sent her to us; anyway, inside 've a year

she'd crept inter our hearts 's deep t' she didn't need any other father nor mother. Eighteen years ago that was"——

"Well," continued the lawyer, "I've come over to tell you that something has happened"——

Sid was on his feet in an instant—his face white and hard.

"Stop!" said he—"stop! If you've come here ter tell me that anybody else 'n the wide world k'n claim my Faith, I won't listen! We've tried ter raise 'er up 'n the way the good Lord 'd have us t'll she's got ter be the best part 've our lives, 'n when wife—Joe's mother—got ailing—sorter all tired out like, 'n seemed 's though she couldn't rest 'n this world—she——Wal—'fore we laid her away over there under the flowers 'n the trees, I promised *her* 't I'd be father 'n mother, too, ter Faith. I've done it 's well 's I could, 'n I'm goin' ter do it 's long 's I live; so, you see, Square, 'f what ye've got ter say 's goin' ter interfere 'n any way, you'd better take it back 'n hide it 'n some er them musty law boxes 've your'n t'll I'm gone!"

"I know how you feel, Sid, but I want your help and you'll need mine," said the lawyer.

"Do' know 's I understand ye, Square. Ye better say right out what ye mean 'n done with it," said Sid.

"That's what I came over for," said the lawyer. "Sit down. I suppose you never heard Granny White's story."

"No, what's that got ter do with Faith?" asked the farmer.

"Wait till I am through," said the Squire. "You know that I was her lawyer, and I guess I'm the only one alive who knows the whole of her story. She got to trust me,

somehow. Before she came here she lived down New York way, a widow of some considerable property and with one child—a girl. One day the daughter ran away with a good-for-nothing scamp who pretended to marry her, and waited for the mother to forgive him; but he waited in vain, for the mother never forgave. Things went badly with them; a child was born; and then, the young mother, who wasn't a wife, found out the truth; she wasn't married at all; the father of her child had lied to her. She found some way to make him marry her, hard and fast, this time; and she clung to him for a year or so longer till a second child came to them. Then, when Faith was born"——

"Faith!"

"Yes, Faith," continued the lawyer. "When she was born the mother died. The father sent the little burden to be laid at the rich grandmother's door. It came to yours by mistake."

"The ways of the Lord are past findin' out," murmured the farmer.

"Wal, sometimes a drunken rascal breaks down and lets in a little light," said the Squire. "That's how I found out; not till years after, though. The man was a tool of the rascally father and came back thinking to get money for information. He came to me, and—well, I bought what he had to sell and sent him about his business. He died a little later in a Boston hospital."

"I told the truth to Granny White, but she refused to take Faith from you. She was grateful to you, Sid. She hoped as you did, that Faith would marry Joe. And now you know why Granny White left her money to Faith."

"Wal, I most wish she hadn't" said Sid. "Things

hain't gone right since. Joe's proud. That money 'n these Dunhams kinder stands between Joe 'n Faith."

"These Dunhams came here to get that money," said the Squire.

"Good Lord! How?"

"Mark Dunham is Faith's father."

"Father—ter my Faith—don't mind me for a minute, Square! It's kinder upset me!"

It had, that was plainly to be seen, and the lawyer waited for Sid to pull himself together.

"So—that's the scoundrel, is it?" said Sid, with shut teeth.

"Mark Dunham is the man," said the lawyer.

"Tell me—I don't know much 'bout law—kin—kin he—take her—take my Faith away from me?" It was hard for the farmer to speak, but he wanted to know the very worst.

"I think not," said the Squire.

"Thank God for that!" said the farmer, fervently.

"I am the only man who can prove that Faith is his child," said the lawyer. "Dunham doesn't know whether his second child is alive or dead, and the man who brought her here died ten years ago."

"Ye ain't goin' ter tell him, be ye, Square?" asked the farmer, anxiously.

"No, I never told you, because Granny White wouldn't let me. But you had to know it now," said the lawyer.

"I'd ruther never 've known," said Sid.

"I know," said the lawyer, "but you had to. Dunham is making trouble. That's what he's up here for this summer.

"How?"

"Dunham has started suit to break the will, says the old

woman had no right to leave her property to strangers. He's after the property for the girl who was born *before* he married her mother. Mighty little of it she'll get, if he wins, I'm thinking," said the lawyer.

"I don't care 'bout the money, Square; I don't care for anythin' else, but—if I had t' lose Faith—it would kill me," said the farmer.

"Well, Granny White didn't want Dunham to have a cent of the property, and I'm going to carry out her wishes, just as I would if she were alive. I'm afraid the whole truth will have to come out. It's a wonder Dunham doesn't mistrust that Faith isn't your child; he wouldn't have to ask many questions before he'd begin to guess the facts; but like lots of men who think they're *smart*, he's blind. Besides, all he can see is the property, I suppose. But he means to make trouble, that's sure," said the lawyer.

"They have made it, they've made it, sure enough!" said Sid. "Robbed the grandmother, robbed the daughter 'n now they want to rob the gran'daughter. Wal, they shant do it while I've got a leg ter stand on!" The farmer was aroused now.

"We must go carefully," said the lawyer.

"Couldn't Granny White leave her money as she liked?" asked Sid.

"Yes, but Dunham says that Rose was disinherited out of spite, that the old woman was not in her right mind; and that he will spend no end of money to break the will, and establish Rose's claim," said the lawyer. "I made that will, and I don't like to see it broken. Granny White meant to have it stand, and she knew her own mind when she signed it; you witnessed it, and you can swear to that. But it will take money to make a fight, and if Dun-

ham don't let up we must fight. Lately, he hints around about some sort of a compromise ; says he's coming to see you. *I think we'd better fight him.*"

"You k'n depend on me, Square, while I've got a cent," said the farmer.

"I thought so," said the lawyer. "I'd warn Joe to keep away from the Dunhams, if I were you ; people are talking. Joe and that girl Rose"——

"I know," said Sid, quoting Abby, "she's settin' her cap for Joe."

"Oh, she's doing that, is she? I wonder"—— The lawyer wondered whether that was some part of Dunham's schemes.

"That's what folks say. I'll warn Joe. Say, Square, I don't want to be underhanded, but I'd a good deal rather the neighbors didn't know about this," said Sid. "Can't we keep it to ourselves?"

"Just what I would advise," said the Squire.

"'N Faith," said Sid. "I can't tell her that her father was a scoundrel, 'n that she has a sister born without a name."

"Don't let her know it," said the Squire.

"Lord! Lord! ain't it curious how things kin happen!" said Sid, as he took the lawyer into the house, to stay to tea, and tell Abby all about it. Sid trusted Abby in all things.

CHAPTER VIII.

"FAITH AND JOE."

DOWN at the lower end of the lane, at the very moment when the village lawyer was telling Sid that Faith was more than fatherless, and that Mark Dunham was a scoundrel, Joe was having his promised talk with Faith. It was the first time they had ever spoken together of the plan that had been made by others for their lives and happiness. One could not say that they had reached an understanding of any sort, much less the one so devoutly hoped for by the anxious farmer. Joe stood with his back against the lichen-covered stone wall, with eyes looking far beyond the meadows, while with toe and heel of boot he had unconsciously torn the grass from its resting place, blade and root, and made a jagged wound in the yellow soil beneath. Joe was uncomfortable.

Faith, dear, gentle, loving, lovable Faith, was leaning over an arm of the quaint old turnstile. They had evidently been talking things over, but now both were silent, and the wall was between them. They were so preoccupied, each so deep in thought, that Tige, the same knowing old dog that nagged the bull, stood a few yards away and whinefully pleaded in vain for recognition from either; and even Tige knew that something was wrong.

Faith, at last, stopped wondering what Joe could see beyond the distant blue, and, reaching down, picked the yellow-eyed daisy that was nodding at her. Slowly,

and whispering to herself the old, sweet formula, she plucked the white petals, one by one.

"'One, I love—two, I love—three, I love, I say—four, I love with all my heart—five, I cast away. Six, he loves—*seven, she loves*'"—the very flowers of the field, her best friends, betrayed her secret. With a stifled sob she threw away the stem crowned with bare calix. She wondered if she had counted the petals aloud; but Joe was not looking, and had not heard.

Joe was wondering what folks would say, if, after all, he gave up his boasted ambitions and married Faith, money and all; they'd have to stop talking some time. Faith would marry him, he had no doubt of that—whether she loved him or not—if only to please his father and Abby; she would marry him from sense of gratitude alone. That seemed a poor conquest to Joe, who wanted most the things that were hardest to attain. In a way, Joe's conscious strength was his worst enemy. It was so at this moment, for had Joe gone frankly to Faith, taken her hands in his, looked straight into her eyes, and asked her if she loved him, Faith would have said "Yes." And, more than that, deep down in his own heart he would have found another answering "Yes." But Joe did none of these things; he thought of the gossip, and of the money that was Faith's, till it became a wall between them. Perhaps there were other barriers, but Joe was not conscious of them. Joe had been much with the Dunhams since they came to "The Street." They had sympathized with him, encouraged him to believe that he would quickly succeed. It would be folly not to accept Dunham's offer, accompanied as it was with every promise of assistance. It was what Joe had dreamed of. And Rose Dunham—Joe could talk to her of his dreams, his

ambitions; she listened and approved. Joe had never talked to Faith about these things. What did she know of them? She could not help him. All these things made a misty curtain in Joe's brain against which stood out, clearly, the money which was Faith's and what people would say; not that he cared so much for the gossip, though it was true. Joe felt that the only thing for him to do was to go, make his fortune, and some day come back—then, if Faith was free——

"Well, Joe, is there anything more to say?" It was Faith who broke the silence.

"No, I s'pose there isn't," said Joe. "I wish I could make you see things the way I do."

"Joe, how can I? How can I see you wound all the loving hearts around you?" said Faith. "That's what you will do, if you forsake the farm."

"There's something besides love in the world," said Joe, doggedly.

"Not worth living for," said Faith, stoutly.

"There's ambition," said Joe.

"Ambition without love is nothing," said she.

"Love without ambition would starve," said Joe. "You don't understand how a man feels with something in him, and no chance to use it. I've always hated the plodding—all toil, and no return for it. It's what's around me. It's what I am, and what I've got to be if I stay on the farm. I can't do it!"

"What do you wish to do?" asked Faith, forgetting that she had asked the same question before, and that Joe had answered.

"I want to see the world," said he. "I want to measure my strength with other men. I want to climb out of the rut we're in here. I want to know what it is to live,

really live. I want to be rich, rich enough to do the things that others can do."

"Joe!" All this pained Faith; the more, because she could find no argument against it, except that in her heart she didn't want Joe to go—and the others—Sid and Abby, didn't want him to go.

"I know it pains you, all this," said Joe, but I've held it in till I can't hold it any longer! I'm sick and tired to death of this place, and everything in it!"

"And I—I am in it, Joe!"

"You know what I mean—it isn't you—it's the place—and—things," said Joe, vaguely, knowing that he was hurting Faith, and feeling like a brute, but he must go through with it now, and he continued, "I'd get away from it all to-morrow—to-night, if"—

"And nothing else will make you happy, Joe?" she asked.

"Faith, I can't lie to you. I can never be happy here. I've got to go away, and have a chance at the world by myself. I want to find out what's in me. Nothing else will make me happy—there's the truth!" said Joe.

"Not the whole truth, Joe," said Faith, quietly.

"What do you mean by that?" said Joe, wondering if he could possibly have left out any motive, however slight.

"I mean that you are misled. These new friends of yours have shut out the old ones. Joe—listen—hear me out," said she. "They have made you forget your duty and your honor."

"That ain't so!" Joe felt that Faith was unjust. "That's idle gossip."

"There's reason for gossip, Joe," said she. "I saw you the other day—with Rose Dunham—in the edge of the



"I can never be happy here. I've got to go away and have a chance at the world myself."

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wood, down by the old lily pond. I saw you throw your armful of white lilies into her lap. I saw you make a garland of them—as you have so often for me—and put it around her neck."

That was the day when Joe had driven over to the pond, by the old wood road, with the Dunhams, to have a try for pickerel. Rose wanted the lilies, and he got them for her. That was the way Joe remembered the incident, but Faith's keen feminine instinct was truer than Joe's memory. While Dunham pretended to whip the pond for pickerel that afternoon, Rose had angled in the depths of Joe's frank, ingenuous nature. It wasn't a flirtation, though Rose had more than half a fancy for this rustic Corydon, who played his pipes and sang his song of ambition at her feet. As she listened, she saw that a little success, and garments of fashion, instead of the rustic habiliments that masked this young shepherd, would change him to an Adonis for whom she could be a willing Aphrodite.

Rose was a hot-house flower, Faith was a house wren, and Joe—Joe was something in chrysalis, struggling to break through the tough outer shell, and wondering what the outside world was like; but he knew as little of Adonis and Aphrodite as he did of that outer world, and he hadn't made love to Rose Dunham. But Faith had seen distinctly, and, somehow, Joe felt on the defensive. A man must have had wide experience to say exactly the right thing when he is on the defensive, and innocent. Joe said the wrong thing, of course, and his reply seemed like a confession of judgment.

"Where's the harm? She's nothing to me," said he.

Now, Faith's involuntary note of jealous protest and Joe's reply, in a way, indicated the characteristic attitude

of these two toward each other. Faith had grown up from childhood, acquiescent to the plan that was some day to make her Joe's wife. Joe hadn't, at least not since he was old enough to fancy that he could think for himself. There was no formal engagement between them—that was latent—but Faith understood, and accepted it. Joe understood, and didn't, that was all. Faith's words and Joe's reply showed this.

"Don't try to excuse yourself! Don't try to spare me," said she. "I couldn't stand that, Joe. It seems to me I shall never believe anybody again, as long as I live!"

"Faith, listen to me," said Joe. "I don't want you to think that I've deceived you. I haven't. I've never thought that I was good enough for you, and I ought to have said so long ago! I was a fool and a coward not to, and I'm sorry now. We've grown up together, as if there wasn't anybody else in the whole world. That was a mistake.

"Yes—it was all—a mistake," said Faith.

"It isn't too late for us to correct it," said Joe. "It wouldn't be right for us to hamper ourselves for life, would it? Suppose father and mother and Abby were right about—our—future; isn't it better for me to see something of the world, and other folks, first? Isn't it better for you? How do we know that we were meant for—Faith, for God's sake, help me! It makes me feel like a coward to say these things—to you!"

"Don't say any more, don't! There's no need to, I understand," said Faith. "From to-night—we shall be nothing to each other. I shall be—your—no, not even your sister—your friend, that's it—your friend! We can never be less than friends, can we, Joe? There's my hand. Won't you take it, Joe?"

Joe took her hand, and held it for a moment, and there came over him a dull sense of the divine value of Faith's constancy.

"I wish I were worthy of you, Faith! But I'm not, and I know it," said Joe. The dog thrust his cool, discerning nose against Faith's other hand. She patted him on the head and he lay down at her feet, for all the world as though he had listened and chosen deliberately which of these two he would henceforth serve; as if he too had reached an understanding.

Talking was easier now, and Joe for the first time told Faith, enthusiastically, of his half-formed plans; of Dunham's offer; that, and the \$2,000 down in the county bank, his mother's legacy, should be the basis of his fortune. And Faith listened, trying hard to understand, wondering how she too could help Joe to get what he wanted. She thought of the money coming to her when the will should be settled and she asked Joe to take that and use it. She was hurt when Joe flatly refused, but Joe convinced her that his success must come through his own capital and by his own efforts. And the tide of his ambitious expectation ran so high that he could not see that it was breaking over and hiding the jagged rocks of Faith's broken ideals; couldn't hear the moan in her voice.

This is how Joe had kept his promise to his father. He had the understanding with Faith, but he knew there was deception in it, for he could not tell his father that there was an end to everything with Faith, and he knew that Faith would not speak of it.

When they reached the yard in the after glow of twilight Faith turned to Joe and silently stretched out both her hands; it was like a last farewell to the thing she

loved. Joe took them, and so they stood as the farmer came from the house to look for them.

"There they are—tergether!" said Sid, softly. "They've made it all up, I do b'leeve! God bless both on 'em!" Then he crept softly behind them and put his great strong arms around them both.

"Now, young folks," said he, "I don't wanter disturb ye, but there ain't neither on ye had any supper, 'n the dew's beginning ter fall, 'n Abby's ben mighty anxious 'bout ye fer an hour er so. 'F ye'd just go in—tergether—'twould cheer her up mightily, I k'n tell ye. I don't mind tellin' ye t' I've ben anxious 'bout things too, but it's all right now. It's all right now! Why, 'f anythin' went wrong 'tween you two—I—God bless ye! Run along, children, Abby wants ye!"

The farmer simply couldn't say any more, and he walked slowly up to the gate, blowing his nose loudly to hide his emotion.

Faith and Joe went into the house—but not together—Joe turned in the doorway!

"Poor old dad! Poor old dad!" said he.

CHAPTER IX.

MARK DUNHAM OFFERS TO COMPROMISE.

THE mistaken conviction that Joe and Faith had "made it all up" put new life into Sid. Half the night he laid awake, picking up again the broken threads of the suspended plans for their happiness. Long before the sun rose he was up and out, getting work out of the way. When Sid felt well in mind and body something had to be done to use up his surplus energy; besides, if Joe and Faith had at last reached an understanding there would be no more talk of Joe's going to the city; the new house must be built this fall, so they could work inside during the long winter. Joe and Faith would be married in the spring, and Sid felt that he must "flax round" to get the farm work done up and out of the way. Thinking and doing ran together with Sid; and he had done a full day's useful labor by the time Abby called him to breakfast. After breakfast he resumed his work with unabated keenness.

"Here, Medad, haul that grindstone over here under the tree," said Sid, "'n git some water. We'll grind up the old bush scythes 'n mow the weeds outer the fence corners. Can't let weeds go ter seed t' blow all over the hay lot." Sid got down the scythes that hung over a low limb of an old apple tree that grew by the barnyard wall, singing, as he did so, in a low voice, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." Medad wedged up the stone and brought water to moisten it with.

"You turn 'n I'll grind," said Sid, resuming the doxology."

"Feel kinder kinky, don't ye, Sid?" asked Medad as he sat on an old milking stool and set the stone to whirling.

"Wal, I do, 'n no mistake," said Sid.

"Wal, 'f ye want me ter keep a turning' don't bear on s' durned hard!" said Medad.

"Say, Medad?" said Sid after a moment of silence.

"Wal, Sid?"

"I 'spose you 'n Hetty 'll be hitchin' up 'fore a great while, won't ye?"

"Wal, I d' know," said Medad with a pleased grin. "Stranger things 've happened 'fore now!"

"That's so, Medad, that's so!" said Sid, thinking of the lawyer's story.

"She's been actin' kinder skittish lately, guess she'll come round all right, give her time 'nough. Het's slow," said Medad.

"She will, Medad," said Sid; "stick to 'er, Medad, 'n the day you're spliced I'll give ye a yoke 'er steers."

"Ye will!" said Medad joyously.

"Sure 's ye live," said the farmer.

"I swow! I'll have ter go ye!" said Medad.

"Ye'll have ter hurry up 'er Joe 'n Faith 'll git ahead on ye," said Sid.

"Wal, I ain't much 'sprised 't that. *They* allus was cut out fer each other, anyway," said Medad with an emphasis that implied doubt as to whether he and Hetty were. "Kinder seemed lately 't Joe was sorter taken by that Dunham gal. Hain't ye noticed it?"

"Heered suthin' 'bout it, but that's all over now, I guess," said Sid.

"Wal, I vum!" suddenly ejaculated Medad, who sat

where he could look up the lane toward The Street, and he stopped turning.

"What's the matter, now?" said the farmer, who stood with back to the gate.

"Here come them Dunhams, now!" said Medad.

"Turn fast 'n keep yer mouth shet, whatever happens," said Sid, with the lines growing hard around his mouth. Sid remembered that the lawyer had said that Dunham was coming to offer some compromise—and he remembered what Joe had said, too—that Dunham had promised to intercede for him. Sid was ready for Dunham.

"How are you, sir?" said Dunham, coming to the farmer, while Rose lingered at the gate.

"Pooty toler'ble, thank ye," said the farmer, not looking up, and Medad turned fast, as he felt Sid bearing on again.

"Fine hay weather," said Dunham, after a pause.

"Ye'up," said the farmer, after a little, running his thumb along the edge of the scythe.

"You are Farmer Morton, I believe," was Dunham's next venture.

"Ye'up," said the farmer, as before.

"I've not had the pleasure of seeing you before," said Dunham, feeling that the interview was not opening well.

"No'up," said the farmer.

"We've had the pleasure of meeting your son very often," said Rose, coming down from the gate.

"Ye'up," said the farmer.

"Clever young chap, your son, Morton," said Dunham. "Give him an opportunity, and he'll make his way in the world. Too clever for a farmer, I assure you."

"I guess not!" said the farmer.

"I am sure of it," said Dunham, glad to get the conversation out of single syllables.

"Hain't got no use for a man that's too clever ter be a good farmer," said Sid.

"You misunderstand my father," said Rose. "He"—— but the farmer interrupted her.

"No, I don't," said he. "I k'n see through a grindstone—when there's a hole in it!"

"Well, Mr. Morton, we have a few minutes to spare, and I have a proposition to make for your consideration," said Dunham.

"Wal, fire away. I'm listening," said Sid, nodding to Medad, who went to the barn.

"My daughter Rose is legally entitled to the money left by her grandmother White to your adopted daughter. That will is going to be contested. I wish to avoid all the trouble possible in this matter, and we are willing to compromise. We will do all that is fair and liberal concerning the property, and I will give your son Joe a fine place in our business in New York. I'll make his fortune." Dunham would have continued, but the farmer interrupted.

"Say!" said he, "I don't wanter be impolite to ye, 'tain't jest my way. I'm jest a plain, every-day farmer, s'pose I ain't clever 'nough ter be anythin' else; but I love that boy er mine, 'n I've got er sharp eye out for his future. I've been goin' ter say somethin' to ye for quite a spell, 'n now seems ter be as good a time as any, so, while I'm saying it, ye might jest 's well set down," and the farmer put the scythe away, as Rose sat down under the tree, amused by the farmer's quaint directness. Dunham continued standing.

"Thank you," said Rose, "this is interesting."

"Take plenty of time for reflection, Mr. Morton," said Dunham.

"'Tain't no use," said the farmer, "I hain't got nothin' ter say 'bout the money—that's Faith's, 'n I guess the law 'll protect her. It will 's long's I've got a dollar, you k'n be sure of that! But I *have* got suthin' ter say 'bout Joe. Joe's jest got ter the place 'n his life when brass looks a good deal like gold; we all on us have spells 've that kind one time 'n another, 'n Joe's ben havin' his. Now, tain't his fault, I cal'k'late. Since he's got ter know you he's kinder gone back on the old ways, 'n we ain't good 'nough for him, Faith 'n me; so I'm jest goin' ter ask ye straight, out 'n out, not to talk him inter thinkin' t' he's too good for us, for—ye see—the fact is—we—wal—we love him, 'n we don't wanter see him go t' the dogs. There!"

It was an awkward moment for all but the farmer. Dunham didn't speak, but the girl rose from the seat, her face red with indignation.

"I—I compliment you for your frankness," said she.

"Do I understand that you refuse to entertain my proposition?" said Dunham.

"Yes, sir 'ee!" said Sid, with emphasis.

"Then I am sorry to have troubled you with it. I shall leave the business in the hands of my lawyers!" said Dunham.

"Wal, mebbe they'll have better luck, 'n mebbe not," said Sid, "sooner they try, sooner they'll find out."

"I am sorry our presence here has disturbed your peace of mind," said Rose. "I think we shall give you no future trouble in that way. We leave to-night for New York."

"That's better for Joe, I guess," said the farmer.

"We were not aware that your son is expected never

to leave the paternal nest," said Rose. "I hope that my pernicious influence has not interrupted a pastoral romance; such was not my intention, I assure you. Of course I know—at least, I have heard that Joe is supposed to be devoted to your—your adopted daughter, I never can remember her name."

"Faith—Faithful Morton—is *her* name," said Sid.

"Come, Rose! We're losing time!" said Dunham, impatiently.

"A very odd name, Faithful," said Rose.

"A good name for Joe's wife," said the farmer.

"His wife! Oh! I didn't know that the affair was definitely settled," said she.

"It's allus been settled, since they was knee high ter that," said the farmer, marking "that" with one hand held on a level with his knee.

"I congratulate them both," said Rose, going. "It is such a romance, I really envy them."

"I'm glad on 't," said the farmer, melting a little. "N' 'f ye mean what ye say, it goes a long way toward changin' my 'pinion of ye!"

"Well, Morton, I've made the fairest offer I can. Think it over, it will pay you better than farming. Good-day. Sorry to have troubled you. Wire me if you change your mind."

"There won't be any wirin'," was the farmer's parting shot, as the Dunhams drove up the lane.

"Dod gast it!" said Sid, "'f Joe Morton 'n Faith don't have a weddin' 'fore spring, I'll disown 'em both, I will, by thunder!" And Sid spent the rest of the day in the meadows, letting his temper cool.

CHAPTER X.

JOE DOES THE WRONG THING.

SID spent the entire day in the meadows, venting the anger and contempt he had not expended in Dunham's presence upon the useless weeds and brush that cumbered the margin of the field. A thousand times, with stroke of scythe, he mentally cut the ground from under Dunham's feet. All day long he wrestled with his hot anger, to work it off or subdue it, but it lasted till the cool of the evening. Then he felt that he could trust himself to go back to the house, and warn Joe that Mark Dunham was a scheming scoundrel, not to be trusted. Upon one point Sid was resolved, not to tell anybody, except, perhaps Abby, that Dunham was Faith's father. He feared that if Dunham were to know he would claim her; nobody knew but himself and the close-mouthed lawyer, and if they could defend the will without betraying Faith's secret that was the thing to do.

Sid went dinnerless. Abby had driven down to the "Center" to buy things and wouldn't be home till night, and Sid didn't wish to encounter Joe or Faith till he had regained control of himself.

But Sid was not the only one who had a battle to fight. It was a day of battles at the farm. Faith, with the dog for companion, spent the day in the woods and fields trying to adjust herself to the new conditions; spent the day

in maidenly self-communion too sacred to spy upon, even in imagination.

Hetty had the house to herself, for the Dunhams had gone on a last excursion and Joe had gone with them.

It was late in the afternoon when Joe returned and asked for his father. Hetty saw that "suthin' was wrong with Joe." Hetty was right, there was something wrong with Joe, and it was fortunate for both Joe and his father that Sid was somewhere down in the meadows. Mark Dunham had told Joe his own version of the "friendly" call upon the farmer in the morning; had cleverly embellished the farmer's plain words to suit himself. He said not a word about the will that left the money to Faithful Morton, but dwelt entirely upon the farmer's rejection of the offer to place Joe and help him to succeed.

It was easy enough to insidiously convince Joe that his father had used unfair means to extinguish his hopes, ruin his first fundamental chances for success. Of course, under the circumstances, Dunham felt that he had no choice but to withdraw the friendly offer made to Joe; he didn't wish to be accused of enticing Joe from home and its influences. Then, Joe, not knowing that he was played upon, realizing for the first time that he was of age and legally his own master, "took the bit in his teeth" and made a hasty, ill-advised resolution. He would go without consent. He would take advantage of Dunham's kind offer in spite of everything and everybody, which, for reasons of his own, was exactly what Dunham wanted.

It is curious how circumstances will sometimes favor a wrong action. If Sid or Abby had been at home when Joe returned, there would have been an angry outburst

that would have relieved the pressure and changed events; but the house was deserted—even Hetty was not to be seen—and Joe, not pausing for reflection, went to his own room in the gables of the old house, where every square inch of wall should have been a protest against his action, wrote a letter to his father stating that he chose to accept Mr. Dunham's offer at once, and resenting his father's right to interfere. This letter he sealed, then placed it on the supper table where his father would find it. Then he selected a few of his own personal, necessary belongings, packed them hastily and hid the satchel in the flowering shrubbery at the front gate. There was a train that connected for New York, due at the little station in the valley below, about half past five; the Dunhams were going by that train and Joe had promised that he would go with them. There was little time to wait now, and Joe wanted to be off before his father or Abby returned. He didn't want a scene; besides, he felt that if he didn't go while the impulse was hot something might prevent. What would the Dunhams think then? He tried to convince himself that it would hurt his father and Abby less to discover that he had gone; he could write to them from New York when his anger was over and convince them that he was right. Joe didn't want to see his father or Abby, but he did wish to see Faith; somehow he couldn't go without a last word to her. While Joe wondered if there was time to leave a letter for her, Faith returned.

"Faith! I want you," said Joe.

"Yes, Joe?" said she with question in voice.

Now that Joe was face to face with Faith he found it hard to speak. He didn't know where to begin, and the

minutes were going. "I simply can't tell them that everything's all over between us," said he at last.

"They'll find out the truth sometime," said Faith, trying hard to keep a sob from passing her lips.

"I know it," said Joe, "they'll find it out sooner 'n you think." Faith wondered what Joe meant.

"They can't see things as we—as *I* do," he continued, "that money stands between us, it always would, I couldn't forget it. But you know how I feel, I must do something for myself, and—this place that Mr. Dunham has offered me in New York—it's the chance of my life, and I'd be a fool not to take it!"

"Joe—when you've made yourself great and rich—when you've got all you've wished for so long—will you be happy then? I want you to be happy, Joe. You know that," said Faith, earnestly.

"All I've wished for—and rich! It seems like a dream," said Joe.

"It isn't—it's real—cruelly real—to me," said Faith, breaking down a little in spite of herself. "But don't mind me—I'm nothing."

"Faith, I'm sorry that anything has come between us," and Joe meant it.

"Don't! Don't speak of that, Joe, something did come, and it's too late now to change it," said she.

"You'll never forgive me—and—I know I don't—deserve it," said Joe.

"I do forgive you, Joe," said she.

"I mean for what I'm going to do. You won't think hardly of me when I'm gone?" he asked.

"I'll try not to, Joe," said she. "Some day you'll come back—and—and"——

"Yes! Some day—when I have made my success,

and—then—I want you to take care of father—tell him how we talked it all over—you and I—try to make him see it as—as *we* do.” Faith was sobbing now, she couldn’t help it. “You think I’ll succeed, don’t you, Faith! Tell *him* so. I’ll do it—you see—I’ll do it if I go through fire and water. I’ll make something of myself yet!” From far up the valley the wind brought the faint sound of the train whistle. For a moment Joe wavered in his determination, but for a moment only. “Faith, I want you to do something for me,” said Joe. “I daren’t tell father—I’m going to-night—I’m going now. There’s a letter in the house for him—and I’ll write from”——

“Going to-night! You don’t mean that, Joe!” said she. “What will people say—and not to tell father. You don’t mean that, Joe?”

“I can’t say goodbye—I couldn’t do that to save my life! I’ve written the truth, it’s better written, all the talk in the world wouldn’t make them understand. I’m going to New York to-night. Goodby, Faith—won’t you say goodbye and good luck?” said Joe with outstretched hand.

“No! No! Not to-night, Joe—please! Not to-night,” said Faith, with a numb faintness stealing over her.

“Don’t let them turn against me for going like this. It’ll all come right in the end. I give you my solemn promise that it shall! Goodby, Faith—goodby!” and Joe was gone.

“God keep us all!” came faintly from Faith’s ashen lips as she sank down upon the seat under the tree. She didn’t know how long it was before her full senses returned to her. “Gone—gone! Ah, no, no! He must not go! He shall not wrong them so—what can I do.

Father, father! Aunty! Joe!" She cried aloud, and the farmer coming up the lane heard her.

"Heaven 'n. earth, dearie! What's the matter with ye?" said the farmer, taking her in his arms.

"Joe"—she could not speak and she pointed at the smoke of the train, that unrolled itself across the valley below.

"Joe! Where is Joe?" asked the farmer.

"He's—gone!" said Faith.

"Gone? Gone where?"

"Away from us forever!" and she hung limp and white in Sid's arms. The farmer sank gently to one knee with the unconscious burden. It was no time for human consolation.

"Merciful Father above," he prayed, "forgive him and comfort her with Thine infinite wisdom, seems like he's broke her young heart!" and Sid sobbed like a child.



"Merciful Father . . . seems like he's broke her young heart!"

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CHAPTER XI.

"TO THE CITY."

It was late the same night when Joe and the Dunham's arrived in New York. Edgeley, Dunham's partner, was at the Grand Central station to meet them.

Parker Edgeley was a typical New Yorker, not over thirty. Typical means that he had lived in New York long enough to get an income that would enable him to patronize a good tailor, ride in cabs, belong to more than one club, go to first nights of opera and theater with the certainty of seeing his name in the list of "who was there" the next morning.

He could name at sight most people who were notable or notorious, could afford to dine, when he chose, in the most expensive places, he was unmarried and lived in bachelor quarters in an irreproachable neighborhood—all of which meant that Edgeley was not extravagant and knew how to live on five or six thousand a year in a way that made him appear like a gentleman of leisure with independent income. It had taken Edgeley ten years to accomplish this and he was satisfied with the result.

Dunham had, during the summer, spoken to Edgeley of Joe Morton as an investment he might make, and yesterday had wired Edgeley to meet them at the station.

"Edgeley, shake hands with my 'investment,' Mr. Morton," said Dunham as they left the train. Edgeley did so, after greeting Rose. The grasp of Joe's hard hand

made him wince a bit and a second look at Joe's figure, badly displayed in the ordinary, ready-made habiliments, convinced him that the "investment" had the sort of muscle not made in gymnasiums.

"Been in New York before, of course," said Edgeley.

"No, sir. There's a first time to everything," said Joe.

"Pretty quiet at this season of the year," said Edgeley, helping Rose into the Dunham carriage; but Joe didn't hear him, for his ears were deafened for the first time with the rumble and roar of the great Juggernaut. Travel, traffic, the incessant roll of cabs, cars, carriages, wagons and trucks, over platform, pavement, and iron rail; the cursing, pleading, shouting of drivers; the shrill cry of the newsboys; the plaintive whine of beggar women; vehicles of every variety trying to run over people and people of all descriptions trying to be run over, yet somehow escaping; all these, and lights, lights, lights, everywhere, Joe heard and saw for the first time in his life.

The loudest sound Joe had ever heard was the rushing of storm wind through the trees; here was a rushing tempest made by human beings, and Joe knew, that at last, he had found the battle field. He was in contact with men and fight.

"Morton has come to the city to make his fortune," said Dunham. "Take him with you, Edgeley, and make a New Yorker of him in a week. You got my wire?"

"Yes, you said never mind expense, so I took Downing's quarters for your investment. They're next to mine," said Edgeley.

"Good!" said Dunham, "see you downtown to-morrow. Bring Morton with you." Edgeley glanced at Joe's figure. Dunham understood.

"An hour at 'Brown Brothers' will fix that temporarily," said he.

"It'll take time for the proper outfit. Introduce him to your tailor, and the other fellows. Send the bills to me." Edgeley whistled, softly. "Tell you all about it sometime," said Dunham, laughing, as he got into the carriage. "Show Morton the town to-morrow and bring him up to the house to dine."

"You will come!" said Rose, leaning out of the window and decorating Joe's plain, rough coat with one of the flowers Edgeley had brought her.

"I'll be there, *sure!*" said Joe.

"You're in luck, old chap!" said Edgeley, as the Dunhams drove away.

"Why?" said Joe.

"Because it has taken me ten years to reach the point you start from," said Edgeley, looking at the flower in Joe's buttonhole, but Joe thought Edgeley meant Dunham's favor.

"Guess I haven't got anything t' you want," said Joe, but Edgeley was not so sure of that, being a partner in most of Dunham's speculations and secretly hoping some day to sustain a nearer relation.

"Where are your baggage checks?" said Edgeley as he beckoned a hansom.

"No checks," said Joe.

"Where's your baggage?" asked Edgeley.

"In my hand," said Joe, smiling. "Not much to start my fortune with, is it?"

"Get in. You'll do!" said Edgeley.

"Can't we walk. I want to see things," said Joe.

"To-morrow—and the next day—and the rest of your

life. You'll see enough before you're through, I'll wager!" said Edgeley.

They were silent the rest of the way down the avenue; Joe, with a thousand questions he was burning to ask, but refraining, and unconsciously raising himself in the estimation of his companion by this reserve. As a matter of fact, Joe had resolved that nothing, however wonderful or strange, should upset him. He had figured it all out for himself on the train. He knew he was a country boy and green, but he could keep his eyes and ears open, his mouth shut, and wait. Try as he would, though, Joe could not banish the shadows of unreality. Joe had lived so long in his dream city that it was hard to displace it; that was the real, this was the dream. Nor was this triumphal entry the sort of thing Joe had pictured. A thousand times and more he had imagined the hardships to be encountered, the difficulties to be surmounted; little money, no friends, the place to eat and sleep within his means, and work—any labor, however menial, at first—that would keep body and soul together till he could look about him and better the conditions. Instead of all this, however, Joe found himself with a present capital of just ten dollars in his pocket, rolling luxuriously down the smooth avenue—Fifth, he could see on the lampposts at the street corners—with his future and his fortunes apparently all arranged for him. No wonder it seemed unreal. The thought of luck had never been a part of Joe's plans, but perhaps Edgeley was right; it was lucky to start with a friend like Mr. Dunham.

Edgeley, wondering a little at Joe's prolonged silence, concluded that the young fellow was probably over-awed by the new and strange surroundings, but he could see no trace of surprise or embarrassment as they entered the

brilliantly lighted vestibule, and were taken swiftly up in the noiseless elevator to his apartment. All of these things the country boy must be seeing for the first time in his life, but he made no sign. Edgeley fancied that there was a half critical look in Joe's eyes. Nor did the esthetic luxury of Edgeley's personal appointments make any visible impression upon Joe. As a matter of fact, Joe was wondering what on earth one man could want with more than one room and a bed to sleep in; here were four or five rooms and a man in mighty slick clothes to take care of them; Edgeley had a valet. Joe realized that his own preconceived ideas of personal comfort were miserably below this standard, and he wondered how much money it all cost, wondered how many years it would take him to get these things.

"Make yourself at home," said Edgeley. "Kent, bring brandies and soda, plenty of ice; it's hot and we're thirsty." And Kent brought them.

"I don't drink anything," said Joe, who had never tasted alcohol except as medicine.

"No?" said Edgeley. "You won't need stimulant for some time. Have a cigar?"

"Don't smoke," said Joe.

"One usually goes with the other," said Edgeley, lighting a cigar and sipping his brandy and soda.

"Well, what do you think of New York," he asked. The same typical question usually propounded by the resident to the stranger scarcely within the gates.

"I guess what I've been thinking about it ain't much like it," said Joe, curiously examining a siphon of plain soda.

"That wasn't a fair question to ask," said Edgeley, be-

ginning to like Joe's straightforward, unassuming frankness.

"My opinion 've New York wouldn't amount to much," continued Joe. "I'm wondering what New York 'll think 've of me."

"Everything, if you succeed—nothing, if you fail," said Edgeley.

"I won't fail," said Joe, quietly, "that is—if I get a chance."

"Well, you have the chance," said Edgeley.

"What's Mr. Dunham going to give me to do?" asked Joe.

"I don't know, you can leave that to him," said Edgeley. "His orders are to make a New Yorker of you as quickly as possible."

"How are you going to do it?" asked Joe, looking at himself and at Edgeley.

"Make you eat, drink, sleep and dress like us, first of all," said Edgeley.

"Can't afford it," said Joe, tersely, thinking of the ten dollars in pocket and the money in the little country bank that he hoped some day to invest in business, his only resources.

"I said you were lucky, and if I were you I'd take the gifts the gods bestow without question. Mark Dunham is evidently backing you to win; he has provided for everything," said Edgeley.

"Guess I can stand it if he can," said Joe, "but I don't see how I'm going to earn it."

"That's Dunham's risk," said Edgeley, still wondering what Dunham's game could be, and trying to figure where this inexperienced country boy could fit into the firm of Dunham, Edgeley and Co., stock brokers—unless there

was money to go with the man—that must be the main-spring of the affair.

Joe heard the clocks striking twelve and began to wonder where he was going to sleep to-night. Edgeley anticipated.

"Want to turn in, Morton? I always have a spare room for a friend, or perhaps you'd prefer your own rooms—they're just across the corridor. All ready, aren't they, Kent?"

"My—rooms!" exclaimed Joe, amazed.

"Yes," said Edgeley, "rather better than mine, I think. Belong to friend of mine gone to Europe. Dunham wired and I engaged them for you. Let's look at them. Light them up, Kent." Kent turned on the electric light and ventured the opinion that there wasn't a better suite in the city for the price, and Joe pinched himself to make sure that he was awake. Edgeley gravely challenged administration for the up-to-date bath—hot, cold, shower, open plumbing, tiled walls, and:

"What do you think of that," he asked.

"Wal, it's a poor substitute for a good swim in the cool river, but I guess it will have to do," said Joe, half realizing that he was being quizzed, and feeling that all this magnificence was far from his requirements.

"I guess it would take a New Yorker to live up to these," said he.

"They are yours," said Edgeley. Think you can reach them?"

"I k'n try," said Joe, drily, and Edgeley left him with the understanding that they were to breakfast together in the morning at an hour that meant the middle of the forenoon to Joe.

There was little sleep for Joe that night. A dozen

times he rose, turned the lights on and off again, trying to convince himself that all this was real. He opened a window wide and looked out into the world. It *was* all true. There was the noise and rumble of the city, the city that never sleeps by night or by day. In fitful slumber he dreamed of Aladdin's lamp, and all that he wanted came for a little rubbing and a wish. Not quite all, for he couldn't forget that he had left a legacy of sorrow and tears behind him. Somehow the quaint old farm on the hills had never seemed so dear as now, and his heart smote him for so wantonly deserting it.

He would write to them all—to-morrow.

CHAPTER XII.

"NEW YORK."

TO-MORROW came, but Joe did not write; he was far too busy. Edgeley had never enjoyed anything more in his life than the two hours spent with Joe at clothiers, hatters, boot-makers, and the many other places essential to well dressed men. Joe, too, watched his own metamorphosis with an impersonal curiosity. He saw the country Joe disappearing and the city Joe taking his place. Edgeley was careful to impress him that all this was merely a temporary necessity. "The real things take time," said he. To get the real things he presented "Mr. Morton" to his tailor and ordered a full outfit. Joe was surprised to hear that the dictator of fashion would be delighted to open an account with Mr. Morton and found himself treated like a man of some taste and importance. Joe promptly rose to the occasion when his taste was consulted, by instructing the tailor "to select the materials himself and make them fit." Edgeley himself couldn't have done better.

"Now for sights," said Edgeley, when all this was done. "What part of all this great menagerie do you want to see first?"

"The whole of it," said Joe.

"Don't think that's possible," began Edgeley.

"What's that yellow tower over the other side of the park," asked Joe.

"That? Oh, that's the tower on Madison Square Garden," said Edgeley.

"Stairs clear up?" asked Joe.

"Elevator," said Edgeley.

"Wal, I want to be at the top for a little while," said Joe. Edgeley understood now. And to the top they went.

"Where's North?" asked Joe, after gazing for a time. Edgeley pointed it out, and Joe made a compass of himself to locate East, West and South. Then away out on the horizon he saw the ocean for the first time in his life and geography began to have a meaning. Edgeley waited.

"What's that?" asked Joe, pointing with his right hand.

"State of New Jersey, Jersey City, Hudson River," said Edgeley.

"And," said Joe, pointing left.

"Long Island, Brooklyn, East River from Bay to Long Island Sound," continued Edgeley.

"What's the long street through the middle?" asked Joe, letting his gaze fall nearer.

"Broadway, from Battery to Central Park. Some day it will go clear across the State," said Edgeley. "There's Fifth Avenue, crosses Broadway and 23rd at the corner of the Square over there—6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, and so on over to the river, and Madison, Lexington, Fourth, Third this side."

"Now the cross streets," said Joe.

"Easy enough up town," said Edgeley. They begin at Fifth Avenue and go east and west. Number one is never anywhere but on Fifth Avenue—in New York."

"All right," said Joe. "I've got the lay of the land."

"Think you can find your way about?" asked Edgeley.

"It's easier than the woods, I guess," said Joe. "Now, how about the folks?"

"How about the—what?" asked Edgeley.

"The people—how many?" said Joe.

"About 2,500,000 within our range of vision, I should say."

"Honest?"

"Not very," said Edgeley, laughing.

"I mean—you're joking?" said Joe, seriously.

"Oh! I misunderstood you. I daresay there are more than that," said Edgeley.

"What are they like?"

"Every nation under the sun and some cross breeds never seen anywhere else. To begin with," said Edgeley, "there's a floating population of two hundred thousand that doesn't belong here at all. Here for a week to buy goods and see the sights. Two-thirds of the others don't live here—they come in every morning from Jersey, Long Island, or up the State; sell goods and go home. Then, there are Turks, Greeks, Italians, Russians, They come a long way, but they don't all stay. They get some of our money and go home again. That brings us down to the few hundred thousands of real population. The Dutch came first and proved their staying powers. Somehow they always carry the spirit of home with them. The Germans, too, settle down quickly and devote themselves to getting comfort and raising good American citizens. While the Irish—well—the Irish govern us. There you are!"

"What do you mean by 'New Yorker?'" asked Joe.

"The typical New Yorker is born 'out West' or 'down East,' anywhere except in New York; but he *is* an American. He comes in, much as you did last night, on one of the thousands of currents that flow toward this financial,

commercial, artistic, literary, and sporting, clearing-house for the nation. It is a queer place, New York. Vice and virtue live cheek by jowl and never know it. People may live in adjoining houses for twenty years without learning each others names. You can know a thousand people and go up or down the thoroughfares every day for a year without meeting one of them; and they would be just as likely not to see you if you did. It is the greatest mind-your-own-business-place in the world. It is the one spot in this country in which to display success or hide failure. It holds the richest and the poorest. It is the best field of operation for the moralist or the thief, giving with lavish and impartial hand opportunities to both. It refuses nothing, but grinds exceeding fine all that comes to it, and it turns out—Money!"

"The typical New Yorker is the man who in himself averages all these conditions. He is a part of them all and he doesn't care to be anything else. He is neither a pretentious saint nor a flagrant sinner, but just a fair all around man, well groomed, well informed, self governed—what you might call a good average American citizen. And he would rather live in New York than anywhere else in the world."

"Well, I can't be all that in a week," said Joe, as they reached the street.

"No, you've got too much healthful color, and too much enthusiasm. You'll lose some of that color after you begin to give and take late suppers. We can dress you for the part, though, as they say in the theaters, and the rest will take care of itself—in time."

An hour later Joe was in Wall Street, and, in the magnificently appointed reception room of Dunham, Edgeley & Co., stockbrokers, was being heartily con-

gratulated by Dunham upon his improved appearance. Joe said he was ready for work, but Dunham laughed.

"Not for some days yet. Not till you get the din of the city adjusted," said he. "It will be a week before you can tell one sound from another. Excuse us for a few minutes, Morton, there are the morning papers; make yourself comfortable. We are going to talk over your prospects, Edgeley and I," and they left Joe to his own devices. Joe had no interest in the morning papers. He, too, wanted to discuss his prospects. He wondered what the business could be that showed no evidence of anything to buy or sell. Probably the goods were kept somewhere else.

Something was being done, that was evident, for past an open door in the corridor there was a busy stream of boys in uniform, with telegrams, thin sheets of paper covered with figures—going and coming constantly. The only evidence of business, in the room with Joe, was a curious machine under a glass bell, with a white paper ribbon clicking through it. Joe looked at the endless strip that piled itself up in the tall basket and saw that it was covered with wholly unintelligible syllables and figures that had no meaning to him, so he returned to the papers. The first head line that caught his eye read: "The Day in Wall Street. Stock quotations." Under this heading was a long array of abbreviated words, syllables and figures; here and there was one that he could understand. Railroads seemed to predominate. Some of these syllables he had seen on the white ribbon in the basket. Joe began to compare the list in the paper with the signs on the tape, and it was not long before it began to dawn upon him that he was in the realm of speculation. He was not one whit the less puzzled, though. One must

buy and sell to make profit, of course, but how could one buy and sell what did not belong to him..

Meanwhile, in the private office, Dunham was asking his partner what he thought of the "investment."

"As an 'investment' I don't know anything about it," said Edgeley, "but for a shrewd, healthy young animal who has a surprising way of getting quickly at bottom facts, Morton gets my admiration. What are you going to do with him?"

"Put him into business," said Dunham.

"Of course, but what for? You wouldn't invest except for profit. Is he coming into a fortune?" asked Edgeley.

"Yes," said Dunham, "or out of one."

"Oh, I see!" said Edgeley. But he didn't, and Dunham did not intend that he should, yet.

"I want you to take him in hand," said Dunham.

"What do you want done?" asked Edgeley.

"Break him into city life as quickly as you can—throw him in with Burton, Gill, and that set. Don't spare him. I don't care how warm you make the pace. I want to see how he stands the pressure," said Dunham.

"And the expense," said Edgeley.

"Draw on me," said Dunham. "I'm his banker."

"And the profits?" suggested Edgeley.

"Don't be suspicious, Edgeley. We'll share them. When the time comes—and if the chap turns out as I want him to—the profits will be worth sharing," said Dunham, "but I'm not ready to show my hand yet."

Edgeley was not quite sure whether Dunham wanted to ruin Joe Morton or only test him, but he liked the boy so far, and he quietly resolved that Joe should have a fair, wide open choice of good and evil. It would be

an interesting experiment at all events. Perhaps he mistrusted Dunham unjustly. They returned to Joe.

"Take Morton over to the Stock Exchange," said Dunham, "and turn him loose in the gallery—then come back and we'll look over business. Don't forget dinner to-night. I promised Rose to remind you that our home is yours—always," Dunham said to Joe, as they parted.

"Thank you," said Joe, and Edgeley concluded that Dunham couldn't mean harm to one whom he intended to make welcome to his own house.

Edgeley spent some time trying to initiate Joe into the mysteries of puts, calls, options, markets, bulls and bears—then returned to Dunham. Joe went down to the end of the city and sat with feet dangling over the edge of the Battery sea wall till nearly dark, watching the coming and going of the ships, and for some hours forgot his quest of fortune.

CHAPTER XIII.

"A SPIDER WEB."

EDGELEY was nearly dressed for the Dunham's dinner when Joe arrived home.

"Great Scott! Young man, you've given me a lot of anxiety," said he. "We were about to telephone your description to the police stations."

"What for?" said Joe, coolly.

"Mysterious disappearance. I thought you'd go back to the office—I waited till late for you."

"Don't you worry about me. I'll find my way where I want to go," said Joe. "I spent the afternoon at the Battery, I think you called it. It's great!"

"Well, you've got just twenty minutes to get into dinner clothes," said Edgeley.

"Get into what?" Joe was dumfounded. "Ain't these good enough?" and he looked at his own brand new suit, then at Edgeley's conventionally proper black. "If they ain't, I guess that settles it, I can't go."

"Nonsense," said Edgeley. "Hurry up! Kent will help you. You'll find two suits in your rooms; get into the one that fits best. Had to send to your tailor for your measure and Kent hustled these up for you. He'll show you how to wear one of them."

"See here, Mr. Edgeley! You're taking lots of trouble to make me look like a New Yorker, and it must be costing a lot of money."

"Dunham is your banker and I'm following his orders; besides, I want you to surprise them to-night. Hurry up, old chap!"

Kent put Joe into dinner dress, mentally noticing as he did so that Morton was a far better figure than Edgeley, and that by the time the tailors got the hang of him there wouldn't be a better man for dress in the city.

"What's the bouquet for?" asked Joe, later, as he stood before Edgeley for inspection.

"Take it to Rose Dunham. It's the proper thing to do."

"Where's yours?" said Joe.

"Oh, I know her better than you do; besides, I'm not the guest of honor," said Edgeley, who didn't wish to reduce the effect of Joe's first appearance in proper form. It was rather a good joke, too, Edgeley thought. Rose and her father would not expect it. There was just a slight feeling in his own mind, however, as he inspected Joe and approved, that he might be raising up a rival in Rose Dunham's favor. Joe certainly looked worthy of it. Except for the fire in his eyes and color in his cheeks, Joe had in twenty-four hours lost every vestige of the country. It almost provoked Edgeley to see how easily Joe carried himself in a dress that makes most men look awkward after years of experience. As they stepped from the curb to cab Edgeley realized that Joe was one of the men that people would look at twice. And he wondered if Morton's luck would hold in all things as it had seemingly begun, as they drove rapidly up Madison Avenue to Dunham's.

Mark Dunham lived expensively, quoting his own avowed reasons, "as a matter of principal that yielded compound interest." Every act of his life was "an invest-

ment" on which he expected some time to realize profit. House and home was an investment; a gilded web into which the spider invited the fly, and considered by Dunham a most important adjunct to his business. His customers were, as a rule, residents of other towns or cities, with a mania for speculation in stocks. These, wanting to find the short road to wealth, came to Dunham for advice and investment, were entertained by him with Rose at the head of his table, were impressed by the evidences of prosperity and success surrounding Dunham; and, though he always warned them against the risk of gambling in stocks, promptly fell into his net. That was Dunham's reason for keeping up an expensive establishment in an aristocratic part of the city, with a long retinue of servants presided over by Rose. Society, for its own sake, had no value to Dunham. There was no profit in it. Besides, certain acts of his own in the past, acts that the village lawyer up in the hills could enumerate, had placed him outside of society, for its own sake. He knew that, but Rose didn't, and he didn't mean that she ever should. Some day, of course, Rose would marry and her husband might, if he chose, make a social rating for her, but he hoped that event might be long in coming, for Rose at the head of his table was an important factor in his business. He felt that he had performed his highest duty toward Rose, and that some recompense was only fair. She had spent her life in the most expensive schools, had been "abroad" for a year, and now was able to yield some return to him. Dunham admired Rose as he would a fine horse. "She had high temper and good points; she knew how to dress and could smile a man out of his senses when she chose"—in short, his esteem was based upon business value rather than paternal affection.

Edgeley and Joe were received at Dunham's with the same impressive formality usually accorded to the "flies." The solemn butler in gorgeous livery, "over-done," Edgeley always thought, though as Dunham's partner in business he knew it paid, ushered them into the great drawing-room to wait. Edgeley was sure now that there must be money in Morton or Dunham wouldn't take the trouble to impress him. He knew that this drawing-room was a part of the machinery, to be followed by a dinner with three wines and rare dishes; Dunham certainly knew how to eat. But Dunham had miscalculated if he expected to overawe Joe. Edgeley saw the same half critical look in the eyes as Joe glanced quickly around the over-crowded room. Joe knew nothing of art or decoration, had no standard for good taste, but he felt a sense of wholesome discomfort. There was too much gilding, too many pictures and statues, the carpet was too soft, and there was too much light; and, altogether, though he didn't know why, Joe didn't particularly care for it. Edgeley watched Joe, and resolved that he would, just as an experiment, take an early opportunity to show him some of the "real things" in the galleries or at the Metropolitan.

Edgeley was right. Dunham had designed to overawe Joe with a sense of the power of wealth and luxury. He couldn't have made more careful preparation for a customer in a fifty thousand dollar deal in stocks, and Edgeley had a quiet laugh to himself when Dunham, faultlessly dressed, entered, greeted them and found the country boy in the perfectly proper dress for the occasion. Dunham was embarrassed, but Joe wasn't.

"How did you do it?" asked Dunham of Edgeley.

"Oh, easily enough. My man, Kent, has resources, and

I wanted to show you what could be done with *good raw* material; to make a New Yorker in a week one can't lose any time," said Edgeley.

"Well, it beats me!" said Dunham.

But when Rose, in a dream of a Paris gown that displayed her beautiful arms and shoulders, came with both hands extended in frank, hearty greeting, Joe was embarrassed. It was the first time in his life that he had seen a woman dressed for the display of beauty. Rose gave a little pleased laugh of triumph as the doors were thrown open and *she* took Joe out to dinner and gave him the place of honor by her side. Edgeley wondered if Rose, too, had reasons for wishing to impress Joe.

However overdone the butler and the decorations in Dunham's house might be, his table was faultless. How could it be otherwise, Edgeley thought; that was in Rose's province. He glanced at the glasses—three wines and liqueur—that established the caliber of the dinner. Morton was going to eat the first real dinner of his life. He saw with curiosity that all but one of the glasses by Joe's plate were turned down. Joe didn't do that; what did he know about the significance of turning one's glasses down in polite refusal of wines. The champagne glass was up. That must be Rose's doing. The boy was to be initiated with champagne.

Dunham talked business to Edgeley, who furtively watched his protégé, and was relieved to discover that his table manners were correct. Joe puzzled Edgeley greatly. How was this country born and bred youth able to so easily fit into manner and habit of the city that he saw now for the first time? Nothing but his speech betrayed his origin, and that wasn't half bad; it had a quaint, fresh originality about it that was attractive. But Edgeley

didn't know that the key to Joe's success was his imitative faculty. Joe watched others and was content to do as they did. Joe had dreamed so long of doing as other men do that the faculty for doing came with the opportunity.

The dinner was a success and so was Joe. Rose was wearing the flowers that Edgeley had selected for Joe to present, and Rose was beyond all question enjoying Joe's companionship, as Joe gave her the history of his first twenty-four hours in the city. Edgeley could see all this and listen to Dunham at the same time, and again he wondered if he was really building up a rival.

Joe drank his champagne without a question—not one glass, but two—Edgeley watched in vain for any outward effect upon Joe. But he refused to smoke with the coffee and Rose took him away to hear Chopin and songs, and Edgeley, very much against his will, was left with the dry husks of business.

"Don't ride, let's walk," said Joe after they had said good night and Edgeley was looking up and down the avenue for a passing vehicle.

"All right—where?" said Edgeley.

"Anywhere," said Joe. "I want to cool off and I want to get some exercise. Three hours over dinner makes a fellow's muscles ache!"

"You'll get used to that in time," laughed Edgeley as they turned to the westward into a long, silent cross street walled in with brown stone fronts. They were silent for a time, then Joe laughed.

"What for?" said Edgeley.

"Just thinking what my father 'd say about this," said Joe, glancing at the long, dark array of stone and pavement.

"Well?"

"Well, *he* says it's wicked to cover up God's earth with stones and mortar—says folks can't expect to be healthy nor good where they won't let the grass grow," said Joe.

"He isn't far wrong," said Edgeley. "We've crowded it all up town to the park, and we drive up there in the afternoon to get a breath and see each other. I never thought of it before."

"Wal, you can't have everything in one place," said Joe, mentally comparing the great business blocks he had seen to-day with the farms and dwellings of "The Street" at home.

Edgeley and Joe turned into Broadway just as theaters and roof gardens were transferring their population to the restaurants. Edgeley paused before one of the most popular of these.

"Come in and see the animals feed," said he.

"But I'm not hungry," said Joe.

"No more are they, they just pretend to be. We can do the same. Come along! It's part of your education; we can have an ice," said Edgeley. They entered, and waited for a table, for the place was crowded. There was music from somewhere and a babel of tongues from everywhere, punctuated by the incessant popping of corks, and half veiled in the smoke from innumerable cigarettes and cigars. To Joe it was a bewildering confusion of light, color, and sound, in which he could distinguish nothing.

It was easier, however, when they were seated at a table just large enough for two, that commanded a good view of the room. Joe observed that Edgeley knew a great many people and that the waiter called him by name.

"Here's a closer view than you got from the top of the tower," said Edgeley.

"Yes," said Joe, "a compass wouldn't help much here. Who are they all? Where do they come from?"

"The compass for this place is that unpretentious looking chap in a business suit standing by the door over there," said Edgeley. "It's his business to know everybody, where they come from, and where they are going, if possible. He is a professional detective employed by the house. I don't think anybody else could answer your question. I know some of them; some of them I can tell you about, and the others—well, most of the others, if well known, would not be here."

"Why?" asked Joe.

"Well, take for example, that chap at the table under the palms over there—the one rowing the waiter because the wine isn't cold enough. Yes, that's the one—two women and another man in his party. That man is employed in one of the largest down town banks; handles other people's money every day from ten till three, for a salary of three thousand dollars a year."

"Well?" queried Joe.

"Well," Edgeley continued, "the man with him is a professional gambler, the women—needn't be mentioned. His supper to-night will cost from twenty to fifty dollars. He will win or lose—probably lose—hundreds, perhaps thousands, at the gaming tables before morning. He has a gorgeous house, horses, coachmen, footmen, and an extravagant wife, a few miles out of the city. I saw his wife at the theater, the other night, with not less than twenty thousand dollars' worth of diamonds on. He risks thousands in Wall Street speculation—and loses. Did business with us for a time; we dropped him, the

risk was too great. His career will last till money entrusted to him is missed."

"Why don't you warn his employers?" said Joe.

"That isn't my business," said Edgeley. But at any moment his defalcations may be discovered, the papers will have sensational head-lines for a few days, and, after much delay, during which he will be forgotten, he will go to prison—for a few years. He will disappear like a pebble thrown into the water, which will close over, send a few circling ripples to the shores, and calmly wait for another. The city is full of them.

"Why isn't he found out?" asked Joe, amazed.

"Because New York is made up of small circles, that seldom touch each other," said Edgeley. "His employers sup on Fifth Avenue. He never does. Nobody knows, nobody cares, where he gets his money—while he has it—and there are dozens more like him here. It's an awful risk! See that man three tables beyond him? Not the man in evening dress; yes, with him. That man is a central office detective. He's not here because he's hungry. He is an arm of the law, reaching out for somebody who is wanted. Look at that elderly, rather distinguished man, the man with gray hair and gold eyeglasses, just coming in. The house detective is speaking to him. That man has served ten years in State's prison for bank-breaking; they won't serve him here, they must draw the line somewhere, and too many people know him by sight. People worse than he is would object to his presence. Two tables behind you there is a prominent politician; the woman with him is not his wife. He helps to make our laws, and five years ago he hadn't a dollar in the world now he is said to be worth \$200,000. There are opportunities in politics.

"Handsome chap just coming in is an actor, who thinks he isn't seen enough on the stage. I daresay he is hungry, and thirsty, too, for he is playing in a theater near by, and has just finished the performance. The fellows with him will give him supper, and praise, and he will gladly devour both. Prosperous looking party on your right is a wholesale merchant. Man with him is a country dealer, in town to select goods, and see what is going on. Well-dressed, gentlemanly looking man at table behind me is a prize-fighter. Pretty woman with him is his wife. They quarreled and separated two weeks ago, the papers were full of it.

"The others are worse than these I have described, or are here from curiosity, as we are, just to see what is going on. The place is a mint, it simply coins money; even the beggar on his crutch outside shares in its prosperity. I daresay he gathers not less than ten to fifteen dollars every night. He will have his supper later at a "hole in the wall," down Sixth Avenue. Cabbies, newsboys, beggars, pickpockets and patrons gather, in, and around it every night, from eleven till the small hours, as insects do around an electric light. But the magnet isn't food, it's excitement; they can't sleep, and they must have diversion. They don't dare to be alone."

"Does everybody in New York eat at night?" asked Joe, as they walked slowly down the street, and he saw other places, most of them crowded, and endless streams of people coming, going, in the electric glare of an artificial mid-day.

"Oh, no," said Edgeley, laughing. "About a hundred thousand have the habit, I should say. I daresay that many are fed every night, between eleven and one o'clock. The majority of these don't live in the daytime, but it's

noon for some. There are reporters, journalists, printers, actors, and a host of others, whose business compels them to turn night into day. You won't, as a rule, find them in the swifter places. But there is some place wide open for everybody in New York, at any hour. That is supposed to be one of the city advantages. You can get anything you want, if you can pay for it."

Joe's sharp eyes saw hundreds of people wandering up, down, and across, in an aimless, hunting, or hunted fashion. Men, well-dressed and otherwise—women, overdressed, or clad in awful poverty—tramps, grimy workmen, and even children.

"What do they want?" Joe asked.

"They can't pay for it," said Edgeley. "Of course, some of their wants are legitimate, but most of them are not," and Edgeley gave a nickel to a beggar, who "wanted a place to sleep." "That chap may be glad of a bed in a five-cent lodging house on the Bowery; but he is as likely to count a pocketful of nickels in the morning, and sleep all day in some den that he calls home. You can't tell. Sometimes I give them the benefit of the doubt. But one thing is certain, they all want money, and they want it to spend—and for getting or spending—well, that's what New York is for. Hello! Here's Burton and Gill. Dunham wants you to know them. They're in stocks. You'll meet them in business, and they can show you more of the town than I can, perhaps."

Burton and Gill shook hands with Joe, but the first verbal salutation was, "Let's have a drink!" Joe protested that he wasn't thirsty when they were seated around the polished mahogany table, in a cool part of one of the most remarkable cafés in the world, but the

polished attendant wanted to know "what the gentlemen would have." Burton said there was only one tippie in the world, and ordered "fizz." Joe wondered, when it was brought, if champagne was the universal drink in the evening, he had seen so much of it to-night. Joe understood little of the table talk, which was of stocks, horses, racing, and sports unfamiliar to him. He looked about the place and saw lavish decorations, pictures, statues, tapestries, and he thought them much better than those he had seen at Dunham's; so much better that they seemed to him grotesquely out of place; he didn't know just why, except that he had always been taught that the sale of liquor was a thing of the devil, a trap to catch men's souls in. Liquor never had been sold in "The Street." There was a bar-room "down t' center," a dirty, disreputable place, but Joe had never seen the inside of it, nor any other who cared for his reputation. But this—Joe wondered what "folks in The Street" would say if they could see this; even from the sidewalk outside the open windows, where people stopped and gazed with wonder and admiration, like those others "who couldn't pay for it."

"Edgeley says it's your first day in the city, Mr. Morton," said Burton, and Joe came out of his reverie.

"It's the first time I've ever been in New York," said Joe, simply. A week later he would have concealed the fact.

"He thinks you are lucky," continued Burton. Are you?"

"I don't know, yet," said Joe.

"It's easy enough to test it," said Gill, emptying his glass. "Let's go down the street, and 'buck the tiger' for

a few rounds. A man's first play always wins, if he has a lucky star. Come on, I feel just like it."

"All right. I'm willing," said Burton, and Edgeley nodded to Joe. Then, dropping behind the others, as they were leaving by the more convenient side-door, he gave Joe a handful of money.

"There's a hundred dollars," said he. "Dunham said you'd need it."

A hundred dollars was more money than Joe had ever held in his hands at one time in all his life, and he protested that he didn't want it, but again Edgeley said it was a part of his education.

"Squarest game in town," said Gill, as they rang in a peculiar way at the inner door of one of the dark, silent buildings, that showed no light and looked like a quiet dwelling-house, with inmates sleeping—Joe said so to Edgeley.

"People never sleep here," said Edgeley, as the door was opened. Joe hadn't the faintest idea of what he was going to see, but he wondered how his luck was to be tested, and why both Burton and Gill had been so hotly eager to come here. Edgeley, too, had shown some of the same eagerness. They had motive, were flushed with the anticipation of mental intoxication; Joe had simple curiosity. And a curious sight it was to Joe. In the long, well lighted room there were men seated at tables, with white, red, and blue disks before them; some with high piles of these, some with few. Most of the men were nervously fingering these smooth, fascinating disks, making a soft, pleasant clicking noise, that was soothing to the ear. They seldom spoke, they did not even look up when Joe and his friends entered, but with concentrated attention they watched the man who sat coatless, and

with shirt-sleeves turned back to the elbow, as he slowly drew one card after another out of a silver holder, that lay upon the table before him. From time to time this man paused, to duplicate the stacked up checks placed by the players upon cards that were fastened in regular rows to the green cloth that covered the table. Sometimes he took away the pile so risked. And this was the "Tiger" that Gill had spoken of. These men were winning and losing money upon a game of chance, Edgeley explained, in a tone audible to Joe only.

"Now, then," said Gill, "we'll buy chips, and follow Morton's luck. Don't let anybody know that this is his first play, or everybody will want to follow it. Gamblers are superstitious, you know," said he to Joe. "Let's try the wheel, it's quicker."

"Play your chips on red or black, just as you choose, the chances of losing are less. If you lose, the attendant will take them up; if you win, he'll double them. You can stop whenever you please, and cash in, that is, call for your money." These were Edgeley's whispered instructions to Joe, who saw a whirling, cup-like wheel in which the attendant spun a ball, which fell into some numbered compartment as the wheel stopped. These compartments were either red or black; spread out upon the rest of the long table were red and black squares, some of them bearing numbers.

"How many shall I buy?" said Joe.

"Well, if I had your luck, I think I would invest every dollar I had," said Edgeley. "But I never risk more than I can afford to lose."

The terms win and lose, applied to a game of chance, had no meaning to Joe. The nearest approach to the fever of gambling that Joe had ever experienced had

been over some boyish game, where a clear eye and firm hand had helped to drive another's marbles out of the dirt ring in the hardened road; that was chiefly skill. Joe had the firm hand and clear eyes, but these were obviously of little use here. He was not in the least excited, and yet there was a kind of spell upon him. Like everything else in the past twenty-four hours, this was like a dream; the realization of his own dream, wherein he had wished to do as other men do, and Joe had no desire for waking. It was all so strange, so wonderful, so unearned, that Joe wondered if there was, after all, a potency in luck. Here was chance challenging a trial.

If Joe had earned, with painful, unremitting labor, the money in his pocket, he probably would not have risked a dollar of it, but it had come without effort, and could as easily go without a thought of deprivation or loss. Joe bought a hundred dollars worth of the glistening ivory chips.

"What are you going to play?" asked Gill.

"Red," said Joe, without hesitation, and, curiously enough, thinking of Rose Dunham and the day with the white lilies, by the old pond. It was the color she had worn that day.

Burton and Gill placed a few chips on the red; Edgeley did not, he had some other instinct, or else, in spite of what he had said, did not believe in the luck of the "first time."

The wheel began to whirl, and the ball was spun. Joe calmly pushed his entire investment on to the red square—and *won*.

"What nerve!" said Gill. Edgeley had lost, but he laughed, as both Burton and Gill swore roundly for having stood so weakly by their faith in Joe's luck.

"Try it again," said Joe. "It's just as likely to be red again, isn't it?" But they didn't dare. Joe did, and he watched the ball in the wheel, as it swiftly spun and slowly stopped; the restless ball bounding in and out of red to black—red—black—and at last settling down to stay—in red. Joe had won again, and had four hundred dollars worth of the round discs before him. Then there came into his mind a curious old New England saying: "Get all ye kin, 'n keep all ye get."

"I'll take the money," said Joe, and the attendant silently placed four crisp, new one hundred dollar bills in Joe's hand. One of these Joe handed to Edgeley.

"Guess I don't need that," said Joe. And Morton's luck was a proverb with Burton and Gill from that night.

CHAPTER XIV.

JOE'S LUCK.

THE days that followed were much like the first in Joe's Metropolitan experience, except that he passed rapidly through his novitiate and was becoming a part of the endless procession of moths around the light.

He shone, to great extent, with borrowed light, for Edgeley and his tailor had with precept and measure made a noticeable figure of him. When he drove in the park with the Dunhams or attended the theaters with Rose, people looked at Joe twice, as Edgeley had mentally prophesied. Kent, too, was right. There wasn't a better figure in town to put clothes on; and the combined efforts of Edgeley, Kent, and the tailor, had made a new man with the good raw material supplied by Joe himself.

Theaters, dinners, drives, prowling about with Burton and Gill, with shrewd half-cynical comment or advice from Edgeley, very quickly put Morton into the atmosphere of the city so far that Dunham was quite willing to acknowledge at the end of a week that Joe had very little resemblance to the country boy and seemed more like one who had spent a year or two, at least, in contact with the city and its ways.

Edgeley studied his protégé with curiosity and interest. He came to the conclusion that Joe Morton had a level head. The young fellow might be forced off his balance under great pressure, but, left to himself, would succeed

in anything he chose to undertake. In short, Edgeley respected Joe; perhaps because Joe was mentally and morally clean by instinct. Edgeley knew that Burton and Gill had subjected Joe to every form of dissipation common to the wide open, cosmopolitan city and that Joe simply saw with curiosity but without temptation; and, moreover, that Joe's conclusions, drawn from a view of the flotsam and jetsam on the surface of this sea of population, were both sound and useful. Joe "guessed" that all this was not an essential part of the real New York.

"Just like a wart on the outside of an orange. It'll peel off with the skin and be thrown away when you want to get at the fruit." That was what Joe said about it.

But the incessant noise, the lights, the rush of travel and traffic, and the human friction, all this kept Joe in a perpetual state of excitement. He discovered that three hour dinners were not the only events to make his muscles ache. He wanted to be in the strife and competition, not a mere spectator. He wanted to work.

Burton and Gill, Edgeley, too, still insisted that Joe was born with luck; and with further reason since that night when Joe got three hundred from two turns of the wheel. The entire party, including Rose and Dunham, had been to the races. Dunham, who knew the pedigree and performance of every horse alive, and who was usually a prominent figure in the betting ring, had taken much pains to initiate Joe into the mysteries of the race track, pointing out the favorite as the horses came to the starting line for preliminaries before the great race of the day. Dunham had backed the favorite heavily to win. Joe looked over the horses critically and "guessed" he would bet on another horse that Dunham said hadn't a chance on earth, and showed Joe that the betting was

five to one against the animal's chances; but Joe was stubborn and determined. Edgeley, Burton, and Gill laughed at him, but Rose gave her purse to Joe, who went down into the betting ring and placed her money and his own. The race was run and Joe's judgment was vindicated.

"Morton's luck again!" said Burton and Gill in unison. "How much did you back that skate for?"

"All I had," said Joe—which was true. He had wagered two hundred dollars and won a thousand. He had wagered all there was in Rose's dainty purse, too, and had won a handsome return for her. Edgeley was uncomfortable, he had backed the favorite and had strongly advised Rose to do the same, and now she was laughing at him.

"If you can play stocks like that, you'll be rich in a year," said he to Joe.

"Don't know one stock from another, but I know a horse when I see one," said Joe.

Joe's statement concerning stocks was not quite true. Every morning, long before Edgeley was out of his bed, Joe spent an hour or two in the careful perusal of the long array of stocks and the variations in quoted price from day to day. He read carefully, over and over again, every word that touched the subject, or listened intently when Edgeley and Dunham talked of stocks. Burton had explained "puts," "calls," "margins," and other technical phrases to him till he began to understand in a loose, general way, though Burton declared that "it was just as much of a gamble as faro or roulette," and that luck was worth as much as judgment.

Joe's first action after his luck at the race track was to insist upon cancelling his debt to Dunham. He spoke to Edgeley about this, and thought it curious when Edge-

ley declared that Dunham did not wish it; but Joe said nothing, paid his tailor's bill and a round sum for the advance rent of his apartments. His natural instinct was to seek out simple, inexpensive quarters somewhere, but he felt that it would offend Dunham, and he had come to recognize the great value of close association with Edgeley, who was his guide in everything.

He now began to do some serious thinking about himself as he paced the floor of his apartment with a prouder sense, that of ownership, since he had actually paid for them a month in advance with his own money. True, it was a strange freak of fortune that had made that money his; they were right, Burton and Gill, it was luck! Would it continue? Joe didn't think so, though through association with Edgeley, Dunham, and their friends, the same opportunities might frequently arise, without doubt. If there was any value in luck let it come, Joe thought he could stand it, but he had more faith in work, and work he wanted.

Perhaps he could live up to his surroundings by work alone, eventually. Dunham must think so or he would not have assumed the risk. The moral aspect of the situation made Joe wince when he thought of it. He didn't write to his father and Faith that he had won a lot of money in a gambling place and at the race track. He just wrote that he was Dunham's guest; that he had been very lucky in getting acquainted with influential men of business, and that he expected to make his own beginning very soon. Joe persuaded himself that the folks at home wouldn't understand if he mentioned all the facts and it was best not to worry them. The ways of the city and The Street were so different.

But Joe placed his dependence upon work; that was

the only winning force he had ever been taught to recognize, and the next morning after cancelling his pecuniary obligations, he appeared at the office of Dunham, Edgeley & Co.

"Hello, Morton!" said Dunham. "Have you come down to make investments?"

"Yes," said Joe.

"How much?" asked Dunham, laughing.

"All I have," said Joe.

"Make or break, eh?" said Dunham.

"Make or break," said Joe, quietly, with a dogged determination that impressed Dunham.

"All right!" said Dunham. "I'll give you a tip. Go over to Burton, and buy on margin. How much money have you?"

"No, I don't want to gamble this morning," said Joe, "I want to go to work! I can't stand it any longer, I want to begin."

"Come in, then," said Dunham, and he led the way to his private office. Pressing a button that evidently had a messenger at the other end of it, the boy in buttons appeared so quickly, he said: "Ask Mr. Edgeley to come in for a moment."

"Are you good at figures?" Dunham asked.

District school in The Street, and two terms at a country academy had been devoted to the three "R's," and Joe thought he knew something about arithmetic.

"What is one hundredth of one per cent of one?" asked Dunham. Joe thought a moment, and replied correctly.

"All right—you'll do!" said Dunham, as Edgeley entered. "Edgeley, your protégé has broken out—wants to work."

"Well?" said Edgeley.

"Make a private messenger of him for a few days," said Dunham; "give him a chance to see the 'wheels go round.' When he knows a banker from a broker, can tell at sight a buyer from a seller, and knows something of the machinery, give him a desk and figures; advance him as rapidly as possible, any position in our business is open to him, and there will be room enough for a junior partner by and by." It would be difficult to say which was the more astonished, Edgeley or Joe.

"What do you think now about luck?" Edgeley asked, as he took Joe to his own office, to give him first instructions.

"No time to think about it," said Joe. "Looks as though I had a chance to work, doesn't it?"

Joe's business career was begun, and that night he sent a long letter to the folks at home. A letter full of buoyant hope and promise.

CHAPTER XV.

ABIDING FAITH.

THE sorrows of separation are always felt most by those who are left behind, and for days after Joe's cruelly abrupt departure from home, and those who loved him, it seemed to the sorrowing farmer and Faith as though death had come and gone with one of their little circle. Faith was first to recover. Faithful by name and faithful by nature, she believed in Joe, and she prayed by day and by night that he might succeed, might gain all that he wished for.

The farmer had no such abiding faith in Joe; nor had he the slightest disposition to ask divine aid that might separate them and Joe for the rest of their lives. Joe had just taken the bit in his teeth and run, and he'd get tired of that after a while, and come back docile enough; come back ready to settle down sensibly. This was the farmer's hope now. He would not talk about it, even to Faith, but he spent most of his thought and time trying in a thousand little ways to comfort Faith, trying to make her forget what he considered Joe's desertion.

But Faith needed comfort less than the big hearted old man. Faith knew that Joe's father could never forget, but she knew, too, that he had not yet forgiven, and she was determined that he should, for his own and for Joe's sake; and so Faith convinced the farmer that Joe was right in his desires, that he must succeed, and, that some

day he would come back to them covered with honor. But Sid couldn't be induced to forgive Joe for his manner of going. He was reconciled to all else, however, when Faith assured him that she and Joe understood each other.

They had heard from Joe two or three times; he was well, full of hope, wanted to be forgiven for his hasty manner of leaving them all; time would show that his motive was right. Faith had written to Joe, but his father had not. Faith had covered pages with details of the farm, the unquenchable mourning of the faithful old dog, gossip of The Street, the health of his father and Abby, and her own unwavering hope for his success; but she couldn't get Sid to write, nor Abby.

"Humph!" said Abby, contemptuously, "he'll get his belly full of husks, and come sneaking home by 'n by, like the prodigal son, 'n want a fatted calf killed. You see! There won't be none 've our calves killed, if I kin help it, but that's the way t'll be—you mark my words!" And for the next half hour Abby was silent in speech, but the dishes and pans were noisy with rattling eloquence.

"The Street" talked for nine days about the sudden departure of Joe Morton with the Dunhams; but nobody knew whether Joe went with or without his father's consent, and the gossip died for want of material.

It had been a pretty lively summer, but it was over now, and "The Street" fell back again into the old monotonous routine. The days came and went with the same unbroken regularity, and with longer beats marking off the passage of time, like the long pendulum in the tall old clock that had stood in Sid's kitchen for fifty years and more. Abby declared that "the old clock always stopped

when anything was going to happen." As a matter of fact, it never stopped except when something had happened and Sid forgot to wind it. It was a serious event that could make Sid forget even his minor duties, and so the old clock ticked off the minutes and the hours; and the rise or set of sun marked off the days at the farm, while Sid tried in vain to feel the old, keen interest in its welfare. It was no use; the heart was out of it all, somehow, but he labored on from sunrise till dark—not for love—but from bare, naked sense of duty.

When Joe's letter came, full of youthful hope and eagerness, announcing with note of triumph that his career was begun, telling in minute detail of the future prospects created by Dunham, the farmer's anger melted in spite of himself. To Sid, it seemed as though Joe had accomplished all this for himself, and against the strongest kind of opposition, too; perhaps the boy was right after all, and Sid thought that perhaps he had misjudged Mark Dunham.

"Now, ain't that suthin!" said Sid, with an air of conscious pride, as he showed Joe's letter to the minister, who often came down the shady lane to ask for news of Joe.

"Yes," said the minister, after reading the letter carefully. "Something tangible, something to be deeply thankful for; few boys ever get such opportunities.

"That's so! Say," said Sid, "do ye remember the argument we had in the middle 'er the road?"

"About moral suasion against force? Yes, I remember," and the minister laughed.

"Wal, ye may remember t' that confounded bull got the best 've both on us," said Sid.

"He did," assented the minister.

"Wal, so 'd this one," said Sid, taking the letter, and folding it carefully away in his shiny wallet.

"You mean—Joe?" asked the minister.

"Ye'up! I hain't told anybody," said Sid, "but I guess I'll have ter tell you; your side of the argument seems ter be gettin' the best, after all. When Joe went away with the Dunhams, two weeks ago, he went jest 's you said he would, 'f I opposed him too much."

"You don't mean that he"—began the minister.

"Ye'up! Bolted! Jest 's that bull did; he couldn't stand the naggin', an' he *went*. 'N it don't look 's though he was goin' ter stop runnin' right away neither. It's kinder bearin' in on me 't I was wrong. How does 't seem ter you?"

"You know how I felt about it," answered the minister, "and I'm glad Joe's got a chance, but I hope you didn't part in anger."

"No'p! That's where Joe was cute; he didn't give me the chance. When I got home from the medders, that day, he was gone," said the farmer. "I've been a leetle riley since. Guess 'twon't do any good, 'n I might 's well cool off; but I do wish Joe 'd gone *with* my consent, it would 'er felt better."

That afternoon Sid took the letter to the village lawyer. Weasel read it and reread it, turned it over in his hand and his mind, closely examined the paper it was written on, as if that could answer some question that he would like to have answered.

"What ye thinkin' of, Weasel?" asked Sid, at last.

"It looks like a fair and square chance," said Weasel, "but I'm thinking that there's a trick of Dunham's in it somewhere. The leopard doesn't change his spots, and I don't believe that Dunham has got honest, but I don't quite see where the trick is—yet."

Sid couldn't see what bad motive Dunham could have. Rose might be setting her cap for Joe, but he'd risk that, if Joe and Faith understood. The pertinent thing to Sid was that Dunham was being kind and generous to his boy among strangers, and Sid, at heart, was more inclined to be grateful than suspicious. True, he had resented when the Dunhams sympathized with Joe in the summer past; but now that Joe had actually taken the step, had struck out for himself, and Dunham was giving him things far more substantial than sympathy, it all seemed different. Sid thought it all over as he walked slowly down the lane, toward the farm. He didn't forget that Dunham had threatened to break the will, that would rob Faith. He didn't forget the lawyer's story; of Dunham's past, that he was the father of Faith, and might, perhaps, make trouble if he discovered the truth, and was so disposed. But he had taken a fancy to Joe, and was kind to him. Perhaps there might be something providential in it all. Who could tell? Perhaps through Joe and his ambitions everything might be brought right, some how.

Then Sid thought of Joe, among strange things and strange people; the Dunhams couldn't take the place of folks Joe had known all his life; it must be lonesome for Joe, and the farmer longed to see, to talk with him. He counted the days to Thanksgiving—everybody came home for Thanksgiving—Joe would come to them then. Sid wanted to go to Joe, but may be it was best to wait. Joe hadn't written just what kind of work he was doing, but he couldn't be getting much pay at first, not enough to pay for board and clothes, maybe.

The farmer wrote to Joe that night, and into the letter he put a crisp, new ten dollar bill.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PRODIGAL.

JOE did not go home for Thanksgiving, nor for Christmas. He dined with the Dunhams, much as he had dined before, except that none of his glasses were turned down now, and dining heavily was no longer an experiment.

Joe had in these few months got beyond the experimental stage in other things, too. "Morton's luck" was a fixed fact with those who knew him now. Fickle Fortune had never ceased to smile upon him, forsaking her other devotees to do so. Joe had often tried her favor to the verge of rashness, when challenged by some of his set to do so, seldom in vain.

It really was not so much luck as others thought, for Joe was a quick, keen observer, and soon got to "know a stock when he saw one." When he made small ventures in The Street, which he was frequently encouraged to do by Dunham, he was able to forecast the result to some extent, and his profits were not wholly dependent upon chance. Joe's winnings at the card table were of the same nature; he knew the game before he risked his money, and he watched the men around the table. He soon discovered that when he played his cards well he won. Joe didn't care for gambling in professional places, but he liked a poker party at home, among friends, or at Dunham's, where he had learned the game well enough to better his master.

At the office of Dunham, Edgeley & Co., Joe had risen rapidly. He had already occupied half the positions of responsibility and trust in Dunham's gift. Edgeley had protested to Dunham that the progress was too rapid. "Morton was being sent up like a rocket," he said, but Dunham only laughed, and replied that if that was so the stick would come down sometime, and again Edgeley was puzzled concerning Dunham's actual motives toward Joe Morton.

One thing was becoming clearly demonstrated to Edgeley. If Morton wanted to win the love of Rose Dunham, he could easily do so; this was plainly to be seen from her manner. But Joe didn't care for women, not even for Rose Dunham, and Edgeley wondered if Joe had left a sweetheart somewhere up in the country. He quizzed Joe about this at times, but he got no satisfaction; Joe was like an oyster for stolid dumbness when he chose to be. But about Rose Joe was apparently frank enough. He liked her; she was jolly, the kind of companion one could be proud of at theater, opera, or anywhere in public. He wondered why she had no intimate friends of her own sex, and why some of the fellows didn't fall in love with her and marry; though he presumed that Dunham wouldn't like it. This frankness kept Edgeley, who was a bit inclined to be jealous of Joe's rapid success, on friendly terms with him; Edgeley did not propose to help a rival to win the one woman whom he loved and was determined to win for himself. Edgeley did not like Dunham's reserve concerning his plans for Morton. All the capital he could get together he had put into the firm, and he was an equal partner, yet here was an investment made by Dunham, without consulting him, and without taking him

into confidence. He felt sure now that Dunham was craftily training Morton for some definite purpose. Sometimes he felt that Dunham had a concealed purpose involving himself; but Edgeley thought that if Dunham ever tried to be tricky with him he could protect himself. He knew too many of the sharp transactions of the firm, in which the "Co." just filled out the sign space, to let Dunham get any unfair advantage of him; but he knew that Dunham was quite capable of trying, if there was anything to be made out of it. He knew that for the sake of profit Mark Dunham would sacrifice any man or woman on earth; and he knew that Dunham was quite capable of building up Joe Morton, slowly, surely, taking time and money to do it with, only to dash him down when the right moment came. Dunham had no scruples in business. Edgeley didn't consider that the business of Dunham, Edgeley & Co. was conducted on criminal lines—far from it—but its profits were wrung from men, and its business was to get as much of their money as possible. Some said that their office was a den of the wolf, but they didn't actually devour the lambs that came to them; they sheared them very close, though, so close that none came twice. It was not the usual game that Dunham was playing, with Morton for a pawn. Morton had not come in like a lamb to be shorn. Sometimes Edgeley felt like warming Joe, particularly when Joe put his own money into some investment, suggested by Dunham, that meant inevitable loss; but Joe, somehow, always fell upon his feet, and often wrung a victory out of what Edgeley felt sure Dunham had meant to be disaster. Edgeley discovered about this time that Joe frequently listened to Dunham's advice about speculation, and reversed it in operation; which Edgeley thought was

decidedly clever, and looked as though Joe hadn't a profound respect for all of Dunham's opinions. The thing that puzzled Edgeley most, however, was why Dunham should push Joe into all sorts of dissipation, at the same time advancing him in the office to a position that compelled Joe to be largely responsible for a considerable portion of the funds. If the mania for speculation got Joe in its grasp, and reverses came, Joe would be in a position to be fearfully tempted. Edgeley watched the books. Joe was able, efficient, and there wasn't an hour of the day when his cash account wouldn't balance to a cent.

In three months the pace that had been forced upon Joe began to show. He lost the fresh color from his cheeks; he looked a year or two older; he awoke in the morning with a headache, for which Kent prescribed a brandy and soda. Late hours, too little sleep, too much stimulant, too many cigars—Joe smoked now—all these were having an effect. In the place of clear, healthful color he was pallid, like the other men of his set, which was generally considered a swift one. Instead of youthful eagerness he had a bold assurance, and he now believed in his luck. His salary had advanced with his rapid progress. He made money by cards and speculation and was easily able to live up to his surroundings, but he never seemed to save; the more money he had, the more he was disposed to spend. That did not bother Joe greatly; one must pay for one's experience he thought, and that experience once won, he would go into the market at the right moment and in earnest, to make his fortune.

Joe had despondent moments, though, when he felt like giving it all up and going back to the old farm. Moments when all the roar and noise of strife, compe-

tition, and rewards for these, seemed hardly worth while. His first youthful ambition had been to do as other men could do. Now—he wanted enough to enable him to do what others *couldn't* do. How was he to know that the same beaten path had been trodden by millions of others before him, and that it had no end?

Winter came and went and Joe had not been home. Letters were few, short, and far between; there was so little time, and Joe was so busy getting ready to make his fortune; he would surely be up to see them in the spring, but he didn't go; it seemed a foolish waste of time with the idle days of summer so near. But when the idle days of summer came Joe went to Saratoga and to Long Branch with the Dunhams and raised to a still higher degree the scale of his future wants. He had spent a lot of money and was in debt to Dunham when he returned. But he soon cancelled this when he got back to the more familiar grounds. Joe felt now that he must work, and scheme, and force his luck to the utmost; anything to make his fortune. He was sure now that nothing in the world, worth while, was to be had without money. Dunham still promised the junior partnership, to come the first of the year, perhaps; that would be worth a great deal, he thought. Meanwhile the letters to and from home grew shorter, less frequent. The last letter from his father had contained a single line: "You have sold your birthright for a mess of pottage." The last letter from Faith had wished him "every happiness and congratulated him upon his approaching marriage to Rose Dunham." Somebody had been talking. Joe knew that he ought to deny this report at once, but he deferred it.

When Joe thought about it he tried to make himself believe that the folks at home had no sympathy with his

struggles, but he knew better. He was quite right when he thought how wide apart his path in life was going from theirs. He fostered the delusion that *they* had deserted him, and he most unwisely, foolishly, resolved that he would never return until he could do so with fortunes made.

Joe's luck continued; many thought it grew, for, with the near prospect of a partnership, it was beginning to be said that Joe would probably marry Rose Dunham. This brought about a coolness between Edgeley and Joe, who felt it very slightly, for he no longer needed a guide. Joe liked Edgeley, but, if Edgeley chose to be jealous of him, of his success, or his friendly relations with the Dunhams, that was Edgeley's affair. Edgeley was not the man to give up his own ambitions easily or without a good struggle, and so he spoke to Dunham.

"And you'd like to marry Rose, eh?" said Dunham, puffing hard at his cigar, in his private office, after Edgeley had frankly confessed his long cherished regard for Rose.

"I've thought so for three years," said Edgeley.

"You've heard, I dare say, that Morton is going to marry her," said Dunham.

"Yes," said Edgeley, white to the lips.

"Well, that is a lie," said Dunham, after a pause, during which he watched Edgeley closely, "though I daresay he could—if *I* wished it. I have other plans for Rose."

"Is there any hope for me?" asked Edgeley, anxiously.

"That depends upon you—and upon Rose," said Dunham, slowly.

"Thank you," said Edgeley.

"You will have to earn her—from me—and win her—from Morton," said Dunham.

"I don't quite understand," said Edgeley.

"It won't be time for you to understand till about the first of January," said Dunham. "In the meantime, go ahead, win her if you can; you have my permission and the house is open. Don't mind Morton's feelings in the matter. You're a good close-mouthed business man and when I call for a settlement for the privilege I've just put in your hands I think you will settle—that's the only pledge I want from you."

"You can draw on me at sight," said Edgeley.

"Good! By the way—Morton has a couple of thousand dollars idle—wants a permanent investment; if you have anything you don't wish to keep sell it to him," said Dunham. "Good luck to you, Edgeley! I mean that—and about the first of January we'll have a business talk that may be to your advantage."

Within the week Edgeley discovered that he had indeed raised up a rival in Morton, for Rose received his own advances very coolly; his flowers and his attentions were thrown aside. Joe's were accepted. Then Edgeley hated Joe; hated his nerve, and hated his luck, the luck that nothing seemed to turn. Remembering Dunham's hint Edgeley hunted up some worthless old mining shares and sold them to Morton for two thousand dollars, for which Joe gave his check on the country bank.

That's how Joe invested the legacy left him by his mother.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DAY OF THANKSGIVING.

THERE was one day of joyful feasting in New England. A day anticipated for one-half the year and remembered the other half. A day that brought together around the heavily laden table, in loving reunion, fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, children and grandchildren; for that one day the family circle must be unbroken save for those dear ones whom God in His wisdom had taken. It was a day of wholesome pleasure and hidden pain; of happy laughter and furtive tear; of physical relaxation and mental gratitude; when heart was open to heart, and all hearts sent up a pæan of thankfulness to the Giver of all Good, for health, strength and prosperity.

Sorry be they who dine with only food and light and music. Sorry, they who dine with wine to force the wit and sentiment. Sorry they, who dine for food alone; sorry they who dine not at all: but sorrier far, they who cannot remember a New England Thanksgiving.

The first notes of preparation began with the harvesting. The yellowest pumpkins for pies, the best fruit for the cider, the corn fattened fowls and porkers to furnish the bake and roast, the corn freshly ground to golden meal for the Indian pudding. Apples, for the mince, made weeks in advance and later to be stuffed with the biggest raisin plums and mellowed with a touch of apple brandy. The proud, noisy turkeys marked for sacrifice

and fed for the domestic altar. The piles of fragrant birch with bark like curling parchment, seasoning for the hottest fires on hearth and in great stone oven by its side. The chimneys cleaned and cleared of swallows' nests, to draw the better; the choicest eggs, sought out by laughing children, from spidery nooks in the great barns where the cunning hens had hidden them in vain; the cheeses to be turned, the butter to be laid down. The great loaves of cake; sponge and fruit, yellow, white, or dark with rich confections, frosted over with thick, sweet icing, and hidden away from little fingers; the red cabbage and the cucumbers, and the hard pears pickled, sweet and sour; the butternuts gathered and dried; the hickory nuts properly cured; all these, and a hundred other toothsome things, grow, ripen and accumulate under the willing labor of loving hands. The day draws near and there is eager watching for letters; will they be able to come? Will Jack, and Harry, Nellie and the little one they have never seen, be with them? Nellie went West; the times have been hard out there and the journey is long, but she *must* come home for Thanksgiving; father and mother are getting old, and another year—who knows—God has been good to spare them so long and—Nellie will come. Higher and higher the fever of anticipation rises. The village school sends its teacher home, and its children too, to help a little and hinder much, the final preparations; a laughing, teasing, questioning, merry, hungry, playful pack of earthly cherubs with rioting health in blood and limb. The boys sharpen forgotten skates and mend the straps, though grass be green at the edge of the pond and never a sign of ice; but you can't tell, sometimes it comes. From field to field they kick the blown-up bladders saved from slaugh-

tered porkers and dried in sun, till coursing blood is ready to burst from veins. Then, hide and seek in the old barns, boys and girls together; or stolen slides, forbidden, from top of mow to bay; then to bed at candle light, with childish prayers quickly uttered; to be snugly tucked in by loving hands and feel a tear-drop from the eyes of a loving one who bends over to give the good night kiss; to wonder why, not knowing that a mother can cry for joy as well as sorrow, as she prays that the innocence of childhood may last forever. Then—to lie awake and count the days that yet remain; to wonder if uncle, aunt, and cousin will come—till sleep comes in between.

The day before. By stage, by homely vehicle of every description, by crowded, belated trains; from far and near, the loved ones come. Oh, the laughter, tears, the chatter, and confusion indoors and out; where to sleep and how it doesn't matter; time is short, and so much there is to say or hear. It is cold without, and crackling logs are burning on every hearth in the great square chimney; the children tease to stay up just a little longer, and have their wish for this one night, till they fall to sleep and have to be carried to bed. Then, the sweet midnight hour of conference, soul to soul, every moment of it a thankful throb for lives that have been spared, or fervent prayer that another year may see all together again. Then—flickering lights in every room in the dear old house—and silence.

There were no laggards in the morning. And such a merry waking! With quip and jest, and pleasantry, the stout old rafters rang; no touch of sadness now, banish doubts or fear; for this one day of joyful feasting let all be merry, thoughtless children; and children, for the

time, they were again. Grandfather, with the white of eighty winters, kissed, and pretended to court again, grandmother with her seventy, and sturdy little Jack of five was quite as old as they. The games of childhood were all played over and over again, and the children won; and so the day crept on till dinner.

Then the scattered ones came running, racing, skipping, laughing, in, and gathered round the long, heavily-burdened tables; one for grown folks, and one for the little ones. A moment of sacred silence, as they listened, standing, and with beating hearts, to the words of thankful, prayerful grace that, in trembling voice, dear old gran'ther sent straight up to the heart of God, before they fell to feasting. Shades of Lucullus! What a feast. There never was its equal, even in appetite. Every one of a hundred dishes must, at least, be tasted, and every one was a dinner in itself. The happy housewife forgot the weeks of labor, toil and anxiety, in the triumph of the moment and in the joy of an unbroken family circle. And when it was over; not with satiety, but satisfied, there came to them the restful hours of evening, with cider, nuts, and games, quiet, hopeful talk of the future, and—good-night—to end the happiest, gladdest day of all the year—New England Thanksgiving.

The long winter, after Joe's departure, had passed slowly at the farm. Stormy or pleasant, Sid would tramp to the post-office daily for the letter from Joe, that seldom came, till he could no longer bear to meet the gossips, who had the old anxious seat behind the stove in winter. They would inquire when he "heered from Joe last," knowing before he did when a letter came. Sid stopped going to the office, and the New York daily paper that Sid had begun to take, feeling that it put him a little

nearer to Joe, was brought to him every day by Medad, who was glad enough of an excuse to see Hetty alone. Medad couldn't get much satisfaction out of Sunday nights—Sim was always there. But he usually came around just the same, and the two lovesick swains sat silently gazing into the fire, each waiting for the other to go, till Hetty got angry, and sent them both home, together.

Faith, dear, gentle Faith, was the sunshine in the old man's heart; she kept it open—for Joe. Every day she would hide his reading glasses, pretend that she couldn't find them, that she might sit at his knee, and read the news of the city to Joe's father; and when she had finished Sid would sigh, and say: "Nothin' 'bout Joe, is there?"

But when the spring and summer came, and Joe didn't, Faith grew silent, and it was the farmer's turn to comfort her. They ceased talking of Joe then, and Sid knew that Faith was slowly breaking her heart for him.

One day, when the leaves were beginning to turn and summer was blending into autumn, Abby brought the paper to Sid and Faith, with fire in her eyes and her finger marking a paragraph stating that Joseph Morton would become junior partner in the firm of Dunham, Edgeley & Co., and hinting that he would wed the only daughter of the senior partner.

"That settles it, I guess!" said Abby.

Faith wrote once more, wishing all happiness to Joe, and the farmer wrote a single line out of the anger in his heart, for Faith, whom he loved as his own child, was stricken down like a rare flower by sudden frost. But breaking hearts sometimes mend. Faith mended hers, in

time; and then their little world went on much as it had before.

When Thanksgiving Day drew near, the second since Joe went away—how everything seemed to date from Joe's going, or hang upon Joe's coming—and "The Street" was busy with its preparations, the people at Morton Farm were busy, too; perhaps, from mere force of habit, since there was no one to come to them; still, the preparations went on.

"He might come, ye can't tell," said Sid, one day; Faith and Abby knew what he meant—Faith hoping—for Sid's sake, and Abby doubting.

Thanksgiving came.

All the day before Sid had watched the people who came from the little railway station in the valley—Joe might come, and he had even conquered his aversion to the gossips, and gone to the office, thinking there might be a letter from Joe, but no letter came.

"Sid's lookin' pooty peaked," said Warner, as Sid turned away homeward.

"Takin' it kinder hard," said Jackson.

"Wal, no wonder," said Sos,' "'Riah Hemmenway's cousin's up fer Thanksgivin', 'n *he* says Joe Morton's drinkin' like a fish. Goin' ter marry that Dunham gal, too. Sid's close-mouthed, but I guess he knows all about it, 'f Joe don't write."

"Joe *hain't* writ agin, hez 'e?" some one asked.

"Jest four times sence he went away," said Sos'.

"Git out! Ye don't say!"

"Wal, I'm postmaster, 'n I oughter know—I've kept tally with a piece 'er chalk on the letter-box—jest four marks."

The farmer asked the "Square" to eat with them, and, at the last moment, though he had a dozen other invitations, the minister invited himself.

When the minister, the village lawyer, Sid, Faith and Abby and Hetty, gathered around the table that was set for Joe, too, that day, the minister prayed fervently that their hearts might incline toward thankfulness, and that God in His infinite mercy might turn sorrow and affliction into blessing. And great hearted Sid said Amen.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PIQUE.

At three o'clock on the last day of the old year, Joe Morton saw the final balance sheets neatly folded, and the old books of Dunham, Edgeley & Co. closed. Day after to-morrow the new books would be opened, and the new firm would be Dunham, Edgeley & Morton. At the last moment, too late to be entered in the books and too late to be sent to bank or safety vault, Dunham had sent in negotiable securities worth five thousand dollars. These could be entered when the new books were opened. Joe locked them up in the office safe, with other valuable papers and petty cash, and took the balance sheets, intending to deliver them to Dunham. As Joe was about to knock at Dunham's door he heard angry voices within.

"By God, I won't do it!" It was Edgeley speaking.

"Too late to say that now. You said I could draw on you at sight," said Dunham. "Didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm drawing, you must pay," said Dunham. Joe went back to his own office.

Some minutes later Edgeley entered, and seemed surprised to find Joe.

"Thought you had gone!" he stammered.

"No; have just finished the balances. I'll take them to Mr. Dunham," said Joe.

"Dunham has gone."

"Gone? Oh, hang it; he ought to have had these," said Joe.

"I'll take them," said Edgeley. "I shall see him before you do. We are to be at his house at twelve to-night, you know, to look over these balances, and talk about—the new firm." Edgeley seemed to be ill; he was white as death, and sank into a chair.

"Great Scott! you're ill, old chap. What is it? What's the matter? Can I get you something?" Joe was seriously alarmed, and he thought how much he really liked Edgeley, who had taken him in hand and helped him so generously.

"It's nothing! Just a temporary fit. We've been working a bit hard lately; I'll take a cab, and go home," said Edgeley.

Joe touched a bell to call one of the messengers.

"Don't ring, everybody has gone home," said Edgeley.

"Burton expects you at his dinner, at the club," said Joe.

"I know. I'll look in later. I shall be all right when I get into the air. I'll see you at Dunham's, anyway. Never mind; the doorman will get a cab for me. I'll take the balances," said Edgeley, who seemed better now.

"Thank you. I'm going to wait here a little," said Joe. "Good resolutions for the new year, you know. I want to thank you, Edgeley, for all the good things you've done for me. I don't believe I ever have thanked you," said Joe, putting out his hand.

"Don't! I don't deserve any thanks. I daresay I had my own motives. It has taken me a long time to discover that in business men can be selfish as hell—you'll find it out, too. Why the devil didn't you stay in the country, Morton?" said Edgeley.

"Why doesn't everybody?" said Joe, smiling.

"I know—a fool question to ask. Well, it's all in a lifetime. I say—you haven't left any valuables of importance in the safe, have you? Nobody here to-morrow, you know."

"Yes, I have," said Joe. "Five thousand in securities."

"You'd better take them away with you," said Edgeley, earnestly.

"What!" said Joe. "Walk up town with five thousand dollars on my person? Not for me!"

"Put them in a hotel safe, and take a receipt for them. Don't leave them here forty-eight hours," said Edgeley.

"There isn't a hotel safe in New York as good as that one," said Joe. "I don't like the risk, but it can't be helped. Dunham ought to have given them early enough to deposit. They'll have to stay here now."

"All right; I'm off," said Edgeley, still looking far from well.

"I'm going to walk up Broadway for the exercise," said Joe, as Edgeley left him.

Joe wondered what the partners could have had a serious falling out about. Serious it evidently was, judging by the effect upon Edgeley. Dunham, too, must have been upset, for he usually stopped to chat with Joe, or to go up town together. It was curious, but Joe dismissed it as none of his business, and fell to thinking of things that were. It was fortunate, he thought, that this partnership was coming just now, for, in a general way, the luck had faded a bit lately, and he was to some extent in debt. He had frankly told Dunham, who had laughed, and said that debt was a good thing to keep a man straight. But debt didn't add to Joe's peace of mind, which was beginning to be disturbed by other things, too.

Joe felt that his nerve was not quite so strong as it had been; his courage was not so good; he knew that he hesitated, wavered in purpose, when he should be decisive. Drink upset him easily, and something gave him indigestion. He would stop the drink.

Joe had stayed late at the office, alone, to look over his conduct and take off trial balance, but the more he looked it over the less he liked it. He thought of the last letter from his father, "Birthright sold for a mess of pottage," and wondered if that could prove true. What, after all, was he working for; what was the end of it to be—not Faith—somebody had lied to her; he had no thought of marrying Rose Dunham, but Faith thought so, and he had angrily deferred denial till too late to deny it with any show of truth. What right had Faith to believe the story? she should have had more confidence in him; and Joe was angry with wounded self-love, because he thought she had given him up too easily, forgetting that all was over between them before he left the farm. Joe admitted that he hadn't treated them well at home—a year and three months since he had seen them. It wasn't right, and a longing to be with them came over him. In short, Joe had a conscience, and it was beginning to make itself felt, as conscience often does when physical strength begins to be undermined. Joe thought till darkness began to creep in, and lonely thinking gradually worked up a fit of the blues. He felt alone in the world, even in the crowded street, after he had left the office. He drank a cocktail to brace himself with, then walked more briskly to shake off thoughts that were disagreeable. It was a bad thing to be alone; then he thought of the people he had seen supping at midnight, after his first day in the city. Edgeley said "they did not dare to be alone"—he

understood now. He wanted companionship; he met a friend or two, bent upon drowning the old year in its last hours, and they drank together, drank to the old year, to the year yet unborn, and drank to each other. When Joe resumed his walk the sense of loneliness was gone, conscience was still, the glistening city was a paradise of opportunity for him who would win, and the country was death to all ambition. But Joe's anger at Faith, unfaithful, stuck like a foolish burr. Rose Dunham! Beautiful creature, but—well, why not? And for the first time Joe, with whirling brain, considered Rose as something more than friend. He thought of their hours together, and knew without egotism that she more than liked him. She had always sympathized with him. She had understood him. People had said that they would marry. Edgeley was a bit jealous about it. Well, why not? It was a good way to be more than junior partner—why not? Joe tried to banish the thought, but it came back again, as Joe was passing a brilliantly-lighted window in which gems were displayed.

It was a curious conjunction of irresponsible thought and opportunity, a trick that Fate delights to use. Not half knowing his own purpose, Joe went in and selected a diamond engagement ring.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE NEW YEAR.

WITH jangling bells, hoarse groaning of whistles, with tooting horns, reverberations of guns and crackers, with jibe, jest, song and clattering shout, with singing crowds in the streets, with one prolonged, half derisive, half joyful, giant wail that covers with a mantle of sound the rivers, the bay, the city, the old year goes and the young year comes in New York.

It is more like the noisy pagan ceremony of the Chinese, exorcising evil spirits, when, with fire-works, trumpet and drum, shrill pipe and whistles they "drive the devil out of town" than it is like the expression of a Christianized people saying the last farewell to opportunities past, or welcoming the coming new ones. It is like a shrewd device to drown with great noise "what pause must come" in one sad, silent moment, for people not daring to be alone.

Rose Dunham—standing by the open window, alone, listened, wondering which the bells rang hardest for, the year that was going or the one to come.

"Did you ring, Miss?" asked the butler.

"Yes. Has my father come home?"

"No, Miss. Mr. Dunham said he would be home at twelve, it's that now."

"I know," said Rose wearily.

"Mr. Edgeley called early in the evening, Miss."

"And you said"——

"That you were not at home."

"That was right."

"He left some roses, with his compliments."

"Put them in the library. I hate roses!"

"Yes, Miss."

"Any other callers?"

"None for you, Miss. There's a man in the library to see your father."

"Very well."

But the butler lingered with some pity, for he thought a beautiful woman should not be obliged to watch the old year out alone. The man had echoed the girl's own thought.

"A happy New Year, Miss," said he.

"Thank you."

Dunham came in rather out of temper, the butler observed, as he took his hat and coat.

"Has Edgeley been here to-night?" Dunham asked, more of Rose than to the butler, but Rose did not reply.

"Yes, sir, Miss Rose was not receiving. He said he would be here shortly after twelve," said the butler.

"Morton?"

"No, sir."

"No one, father, I've had the house quite to myself. Dining alone is not very entertaining," said Rose.

"I couldn't help it," said Dunham, impatiently.

"There's a man in the library, sir, says he's here by appointment. Wouldn't give his name," said the butler.

"All right, it's Peters. Tell him to wait till I want him. Edgeley and Morton should be here soon; we have business to talk over and we are not to be disturbed, understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Put a cold bottle in the dining room," said Dunham. "Well, Rose, sorry you had to miss theater to-night. Business, you know"——

"I know, it's business, always!" said Rose.

"Well, why not? You ought to be used to it by this time. You are the daughter of a business man and you'll probably be a business man's wife."

"Not till some business man asks me," said she.

"That's just what Edgeley has done, to-day."

"Edgeley! You mean that he has asked *you*"——

"Certainly!"

"And you said"——

"Yes."

"No!"

"What?"

"I say *No!*"

"Come, come, Rose! don't be foolish! Edgeley is a good match and you'd better consider his proposition. Best man in a deal that I know of," said Dunham.

"I dare say," said Rose, "but I am not a deal, and I refuse to be considered a business proposition."

"He's fond of you," Dunham persisted.

"I can't help that, can I? I have not encouraged him."

"What's your objection to Edgeley?"

"None, except that I don't love him."

"Fiddlesticks! Marrying for love isn't a good investment nowadays. It is high time to stop the boarding-school views of life and look at things sensibly. You are mopy and morbid. Oh, I don't blame you for it! It must be devilish dull for you at times, but I can't make society for you. I've never gone in for that sort of thing, and—and—well, I'm too busy. You will marry some

time, of course, and Edgeley can take you out of all this. He's your refuge."

"I have said that I don't love him. I do not even like him," said Rose.

"Why not?"

"Because—he is not sincere, and because he isn't honest."

"Nonsense! what man is? Rose, I can't afford to have you misjudge Edgeley. I am under obligations to him; he is my partner and I can't refuse anything reasonable that he may ask. It is a good match and I want you to think it over. I have given him my consent," said Dunham.

"And I am to be made part of a deal, turned over to him as a kind—of—collateral, I think you call it," exclaimed Rose, with indignation. Dunham was angry and he suppressed an oath.

"Oh, I know!" continued Rose. "It's business! I am a part of your capital. I am your daughter, your flesh and blood; displayed at your table, set to entertain your guests, who are asked to dine because it is business. Once in the net, I am expected to hold them there by a woman's arts. If I have beauty, it is your asset. I may not resent impertinent gaze or coarse compliment, it would offend your guest, it would hurt your *business*! And all the time I know that I am a false light on the rocky shore for your profit. I hate it! I hate myself! What else can I do but hate myself! What can I do but despise you?"

"I don't see why you should complain, it's the way of the world," said Dunham.

"Yes! The way of the world! But whence does it lead? Do you ever think of that? I have no friends of

my age and sex, I am left to my own devices, with no one to guide or advise. I have never had one hour of a mother's love or care. Aren't you afraid? Don't you care? I have a mind and a will of my own; suppose I were to follow your example for my own advantage; if you have no scruples why should I? If I have a market value why should I not have the profit for myself?" And Rose, with bare arms and neck, as she had dressed for the theater, with cheeks aflame, stood before her father and waited for his answer.

"Rose! for God's sake, don't talk like that!" said he.

"It does not sound pretty to call things by their right names, does it? I have no desire to throw myself away, but if ever I do—it will be your fault, not mine," said Rose.

"You look at things too seriously," said Dunham.

"I have thought of it all, I know the dangers. I want you to marry Edgeley, if for no other reason, to protect yourself."

"And to enlarge my usefulness at the same time, I presume. A good business arrangement. Do then for him *and* you, what I have so far done for you alone."

"Well, why not? Other women do not consider it dishonorable to further the interests of those upon whom they depend. Your own happiness depends upon this," said Dunham, doggedly.

"My existence, yes. My happiness, no!"

"Well," said Dunham, losing patience, "you will do as you please, I dare say, women always do."

"I don't believe that!"

"I insist upon you not offending Edgeley. Of course, I can't compel you." Dunham knew that strategy was necessary now.

"O, I dare say I shall do as you wish. A woman protests, then yields." Rose was tired of the argument, and she went to the window to watch for—Joe.

"I want you to promise one thing," said Dunham. "Don't give Edgeley a positive no—at least not yet—hold him off."

"For business reasons, I suppose!"

"Yes, I told you I was under obligation to him."

"And if I consent to marry him the obligation will be cancelled?" she asked.

"Of course, you can put it that way, but I don't know who would be a better husband for you. What do you mean when you say that he isn't sincere or honest?"

"He says that he loves me; I am sure that he does not. That is not sincere. He offers to me the threadbare companionship that too many others have had as a gift. That is not honest. He will marry me because he thinks I am a good bargain, because I have a certain decorative value; and, because he wants the sensation of a new conquest."

"Edgeley isn't worse than most men. They all settle down some time."

"Yes, I know! into the ashes of a burned out existence. They galvanize the hollow shell that is left by marrying some one who is content not to ask questions. I can't help asking questions."

"Don't," said Dunham, "you'll be unhappy if they are answered, and if they are not you'll imagine the worst; either way you'll be unhappy. You are like your mother. Of course, I'm not going to force you to marry Edgeley—but we are in a business deal that promises to give us a fortune if everything goes right; you will be rich and Edgeley will be able to place you in a position to laugh

at the rest of the world." Dunham seemed very much in earnest.

"With money gained dishonestly," said Rose.

"How do you know that?" exclaimed Dunham, sharply.

"I dare say I'm not supposed to know it, but I do. People look with distrust upon your business methods. The men you bring here to dine sometimes tell me how clever and sharp you are in outwitting others. In the morning, I read of failure and ruin, with dependent families left destitute; you have outwitted them in business. 'An evening paper last night said that there was a 'narrow margin between your methods and prison.' Is that true?"

"See here, Rose! You'd better leave these things alone. Every business man has enemies."

"I can't leave them alone! I can't avoid what people say. I can't avoid what I have to see for myself. The men who come here to you, whom I have to entertain at our table, are always scheming. You are always scheming. Money, money, money! There is no other atmosphere to breathe!"

"It buys all there is to live for, what more do you want?"

"What more? The things that money cannot buy. It seems to me that I have nothing in the world that I *do* want. I have no companions, no friends, I go to no one; no one comes to me. In all this great city there is no woman to whom I can turn for confidence, advice, or companionship; whose fault is that, yours or mine?"

"I suppose it is mine," said Dunham, "but I can't help it now. I never cared much about the society end of things. I made a fool of myself once; that shut me out

for the rest of my life, I daresay that shuts you out, too, as it shut your mother out. I wish you wouldn't force me to talk about these things."

"You never speak of my mother—was—was she an unworthy woman? If she was you needn't answer!"

"No! I've never talked to you about her because—well—the fact is we were a pair of love struck idiots. Her mother didn't like me, so we made a foolish runaway match. It was a big mistake. She wasn't happy, I wasn't happy; and we soon found out that we had sacrificed everything for nothing. She died when you were too young to remember. I suppose I ought to have married again—for your sake, but I didn't—and"——

"And what?" Rose was inexorable.

"And I can't be anything but a *business* man. Edgeley is young, likes the society racket; with money and his name he can do for you what I can't."

Dunham was greatly relieved to get the subject back to original ground again. He didn't care to discuss his past with his own child.

"And Joe Morton, are you going to make a business man of him?" asked Rose.

"I'm afraid Morton's pace is too swift to last," said Dunham.

"Why don't you warn him?"

"Because, the faster he goes the better it suits me—that is—I don't mean exactly that," said Dunham, as if he had betrayed himself, "I warn you not to encourage his attentions."

"You urged me to do so, at first."

"It suited my purpose then."

"Your warning comes too late," said Rose.

"Why?" Dunham seemed a bit anxious now.

"Because—I obeyed you," said she.

"Are you in love with Morton?"

"Perhaps."

"And he?"

"If Joe Morton asks me to be his wife, I shall marry him," said Rose, quietly.

"Good God! caught in my own trap!" exclaimed Dunham.

"Father!" Rose was startled for her own sake and for Joe's. If he was in danger she must discover how. She would not hesitate to warn him, even against her father.

"I know it's my own fault, but it must not go any further, you'll know why to-morrow. *Does* he love you?"

"I don't know—but"—

"Good! It hasn't gone too far—don't let it—I dare-say he's infatuated with you; thinks he is in love with you, perhaps, and you've led him on nicely. It's quite like the young fool, with the flush of wine upon him, to propose to you, but you mustn't let him. My purpose is served now."

"*Your* purpose! And I—what thing am I in your estimation that you should use me thus? Do you want me to hate myself? Do you want me to hate you? What is your purpose? Tell me! You *shall* tell me."

"What for?"

"For reparation. To undo any wrong I may have done or that you intend," said Rose, determined that she would know the truth and warn Joe. But Dunham was politic.

"Nonsense! Haven't I told you that Joe is to be junior partner in the firm?" said he. "I wouldn't bother about business affairs if I were you."

"Mr. Edgeley." It was the butler who saved Dunham from further questions.

"All right, tell him to come up."

"I won't see him," said Rose, and she left the room.

"If she takes the bit in her teeth, there'll be trouble; her mother was hard to drive," thought Dunham as Edgeley entered.

CHAPTER XX.

DUNHAM, EDGELEY & CO.

EDGELEY looked all of ten years older as he entered and stood, silent, as though waiting for Dunham to speak first. The open air, or what other means he had taken to recover from the attack at the office, had evidently helped him little.

"Hullo, Edgeley! Here at last! A devilish uncomfortable half hour I've had waiting for you. Well?" said Dunham.

"You demanded your price and I've paid it," said Edgeley.

"How?"

"Your accounts are five thousand dollars short; negotiable securities to that amount are missing from the safe," said Edgeley.

"And Morton knows the combination?" asked Dunham.

"Of course. Here are the securities. You'd better take them."

"Where's Morton?" asked Dunham, putting the securities in his pocket and lighting a cigar.

"Dining rather too well than wisely, with Burton and Gill at the club."

"Drinking?"

"They are good three bottle men," said Edgeley.

"Good! It is a pity to stop his career," said Dunham, more to himself than to Edgeley.

"You can't, by fair means. Everything he touches turns to profit. If he had half a chance, and capital, he'd own the street. I wish I had his luck."

"No one saw you at the office?"

"No one."

"You are sure that suspicion will fall upon Morton if we call in an expert?"

"Judge for yourself. The securities are not entered in books or balance sheets and they are not in the safe. The funds are short \$5,000, and Morton is living at a pace beyond reasonable salary, thanks to you," said Edgeley.

"If we could wait, Morton would probably get into trouble without assistance, but we can't wait."

Dunham was talking half to himself again as he paced the floor.

Edgeley interrupted him:

"Dunham, how long have we been partners in"—

"In business?" said Dunham.

"I believe I was going to say—crime," said Edgeley.

"We have had some pretty close transactions in the past ten years," said Dunham, tossing his ashes into the fireplace.

"And I've stood by you through all of them, but we've done no such dirty work as this. There must be big profit in it somewhere."

"There is," said Dunham quietly, and watching Edgeley.

"You've always dealt squarely with me till now."

"Well, what's wrong now?"

"I'm suspicious, and until I know that you have not

taken an unfair advantage of me I shall be on my guard," said Edgeley. "Don't you think it is time to trust me wholly?"

"Nonsense!" said Dunham. "You'll get your share; Morton will be out of your way—Rose likes him, but you'll marry her."

"Then as a member of your family you'd better trust me," said Edgeley.

"As a member of my family, I've got to trust you," said Dunham. "If you don't win Rose my scheme falls to the ground. The firm of Dunham, Edgeley & Co. has got to make a big winning or go under, and I've found a way to make it. I told you we'd talk business to-night. Do you think I would have forced you into the game if I hadn't intended to trust you?"

"And Morton's ruin is a part of this scheme?" said Edgeley.

"Oh, Morton will be let down easily; he will be more scared than hurt. Morton will be suspected of defalcation; he won't be junior partner in the firm, and his father will make good the deficiency to hush the matter up," said Dunham.

"You are not taking all that risk to win five thousand dollars, are you?" asked Edgeley.

"Wait," said Dunham. "If you are to be a member of my family you must hear some of the family history. Have a cigar?" Edgeley lighted one of Dunham's perfectos.

"Rose's grandmother, my disrespected mother-in-law, died a little more than a year ago. She didn't like me because—I married her daughter without consulting her. Rose was her nearest of kin, but she left her property to

a country girl whom Joe Morton was expected to marry."

"How much?" asked Edgeley.

"Fifty thousand in cash and some scrub land out West," said Dunham.

"Well?"

"Well, of course I determined to break that will, for Rose's sake."

"That should be easy enough."

"But the old man Morton had adopted the country girl and threatened to defend the will with every dollar he had in the world."

"How much is he worth?" asked Edgeley.

"Perhaps five thousand dollars."

"I see, now, cripple him and spoil defense," said Edgeley.

"Precisely."

"Every man has his price, but I don't think I'd take all that trouble for fifty thousand dollars," said Edgeley.

"No," said Dunham, lighting another cigar, "I don't think *I* would. That scrub land in the West covers all the territory of the old Phoenix mines."

"But the mines have never been worth a cent," said Edgeley.

"The property has never been worked in earnest. I've had it prospected and I know that it is one of the richest silver mines in America. My departed mother-in-law owned nearly every inch of the property, and the deeds are locked up in the musty boxes of a village lawyer, who doesn't know their value; why, three months after I break that will, Phoenix will be worth a million, may be more. Now you know what we are working for."

"Good God! and I sold my shares to Joe Morton for two thousand dollars," said Edgeley.

"The devil you did!"

"Fact." Edgeley rose and walked the floor.

"One thing I don't quite understand," said he after some pause.

"What is it?" said Dunham.

"You wouldn't have included me in this if you hadn't needed me."

"Right," said Dunham, "Rose says she will marry Morton if he asks her. If Morton marries Rose that will won't be broken, or, if it is, neither you nor I will ever touch a share of Phoenix."

"I see it!" said Edgeley.

"You win Rose. I'll break the will, the property comes to her; you marry her—and it"——

"And you want"——

"Half." Dunham rose and faced Edgeley.

"On what conditions?" asked Edgeley.

"Your written promise, that's all," said Dunham.

"It is yours. What is the next move?" Edgeley had found his price.

"Arrest Joe for loss of the securities, to-night. I have an officer waiting in the library. Thinking the securities were not safe for forty-eight hours at the office we went down to get them. They were gone, and no memorandum in the books. I wired his father this afternoon, anonymously, of course, that Joe was in trouble; that'll fetch him by the first train."

"It isn't a very clever trick, is it?" said Edgeley.

"If I hadn't been a fool years ago, the property would have been mine without all this bother." The bell rang at the outer door.

"That's Joe Morton," said Dunham.

"I wish I had his luck," said Edgeley.

"You have," said Dunham.

CHAPTER XXI.

IF JOE LOVED ROSE.

THAT Joe had not dined wisely but too well was abundantly evident from his appearance, as he rather noisily entered the room with an armful of beauty roses. Joe was very close indeed to the border line between sobriety and intoxication. Edgeley and Dunham exchanged glances of congratulation when they saw his condition. What they had to do would be so much easier.

"Hello, Edgeley!" said Joe. "Why didn't you join us, you said you would—greatest dinner ever! Why didn't you show up?"

"Because I had business that needed a clear head," said Edgeley.

"It's lucky I hadn't," said Joe. "My head's going round like a top. I've had too much champagne. Hope I haven't kept you waiting, Mr. Dunham."

"Come, let us get to business! You have the balance sheets, Morton?" said Dunham.

"Balances? Why, haven't you got them yet? I gave them to Edgeley, he said"—

"There they are," said Edgeley, handing them to Dunham.

"We'll go to the dining room and look them over," said Dunham.

"Oh, hang business for a few minutes; this is New Year's. Where's Rose, I want to deliver these flowers myself," said Joe.

"Too late," said Dunham, "Rose has retired."

"Am I disturbing business? May I come in?" said Rose, in the doorway. "I saw Joe from my window"——

"And you came to scold him for being late. I envy Joe!" said Edgeley.

"Scold him for taking too much wine," said Dunham.

"It's the last. I shall turn over new leaves now," said Joe.

"A happy New Year, and these for a token," said Joe, delivering the flowers to Rose.

"Thank you, they are beautiful. I love roses," said she, though she had banished Edgeley's earlier offering to the butler and library, because she hated them.

"I shall be green with jealousy till I know that mine were received," said Edgeley. "I can't let Joe have all the field to himself."

"You shall resume your normal color at once, they are carefully preserved," said Rose.

"Come, come, Rose! We are waiting!" said Dunham, impatiently.

"Oh, I know you are all dying to talk business," said she, but not disposed to go.

"That's right, Joe is to become the junior partner of the firm to-morrow," said Dunham, turning toward the dining room.

"I congratulate the firm," said Rose.

"Swift progress for thirteen months," said Edgeley—"luck and daring seem to be worth more than capital."

"Wish I had all three," said Joe.

"Come, we're losing time," said Dunham. "Good night, Rose! We'll talk business in the dining room, look over the balance sheets to date and drink a cold bottle to the success of the new firm. Come, Edgeley, come,

Joe!" Dunham led the way into the dining room, closely followed by Edgeley. Joe, at the door, turned quickly and came back to Rose.

"There's a story to go with the roses," said he, "I'll tell you after we get through business." As he spoke, he took the ring from his pocket and put it upon her finger. Rose understood, and she thought of her father's words—"with the flush of wine upon him."

"Joe, not to-night! To-morrow," said she.

"Not to-morrow—to-night!" said Joe.

"Are you coming, Joe?" said Edgeley, reappearing. "Dunham is waiting."

"All right, I'm with you," and Joe joined Dunham in the dining room. Dunham seemed in no hurry for Edgeley to join them as they drank to the success of the new firm; he had sent Edgeley to Rose.

"Don't go, Rose! You know that I have something to say to you. Your father has told you?" said Edgeley.

"Yes," said Rose, caressing the flowers that Joe had brought.

"And—*your* answer.

"Is easily given—I love some one else."

"Who?"

"Pardon me! You have no right to ask that question," said Rose.

"Morton?" But Rose was silent.

"Can't you see that he is only a straw? Do you think that your father has any intention of letting him succeed?" Edgeley was full of jealous anger.

"Then why is he to be the junior partner?" she asked. Edgeley felt that he had said too much.

"I am not at liberty to discuss the secrets of the firm, but you shall never marry Joe Morton!"

"Oh, indeed! Threats! If I don't, I'll marry you; will that satisfy you?" said Rose, not at all disposed to treat the subject seriously; Edgeley had protested his love for her a hundred times before.

"Perfectly; is that a bargain?" asked Edgeley, eagerly.

"Yes, on one condition."

"What condition?"

"You are not to make love to me again, till—till I ask you," said Rose, laughing.

"Agreed!"

"A note for you, Miss Rose," said the butler.

"At this time of night? That's curious," said Rose, taking note from salver.

"Man who brought it is waiting."

"For an answer? Very well, I'll ring. Excuse me, Mr. Edgeley?" She began to tear the envelope.

"Au revoir, I shall hold you to your promise," said Edgeley, going.

"And I'll keep it—if I am compelled to," said she. Edgeley returned to the dining-room.

It would be strange if I had to keep that promise," said Rose, falling into reverie and forgetting the note, half opened in her hand. She must have forgotten for some time, for the apologetic voice of the butler brought her back to the realization that some one was waiting for an answer.

"This is the man who brought the note, Miss—says he must see you." Rose turned from the smouldering fire, and saw—Joe's father.

"Why—it's—Mr. Morton!" and she started to go to him, with both hands outstretched, as she would to one who was dear to her. Then she remembered that they

had met but once, and not pleasantly—but he was Joe's father.

"John, take Mr. Morton's hat and coat."

"No, Miss, I'll keep 'em, 'f it's all the same ter you." Rose dismissed the butler.

"Won't you sit by the fire, Mr. Morton. I'll tell my father you are here. I presume you wish to see him."

"No, don't call yer father, 'n I won't set down, 'f it's all the same ter you. It's *you* I wanted ter see first, so I'll jest say what I've got ter, 'n go. Mebbe 'twon't do any good."

"What can I do for you, Mr. Morton?"

"You k'n send Joe back to us." There was a tender, heart-full yearning in the old man's voice, and Rose saw that his hair was whiter, his form less erect than when she saw him last, but Rose knew nothing of the causes of the estrangement between Joe and his people.

"How can *I* do that?" she asked.

"It ain't for me, ye know; I k'n stand it, I'm old 'n hard, 'n I'm user ter disappointments; I hain't got ter stand 'em much longer. But—Faith"—

"Oh—Faith—I remember!" and it seemed to Rose that some one was about to wrest from her the happiness almost within her grasp.

"She's young, with all her life before her, 'n we've kinder brought her up ter think 't there wasn't nothin' else ter live for but Joe. Joe thought so, too, t'll you came. 'N now, she's pinin' away, leetle by leetle; she's tried ter hide it, but it's got worse day by day, t'll she's jest a breakin' her heart! She won't say anythin', but I know, Lord, I know! 'N there ain't but one thing ter cure her. Send Joe back to us!"

"Your son is his own master, Mr. Morton," said Rose,

again caressing Joe's roses, and feeling defiance in her heart.

"No, he ain't!"

"Why don't you appeal to him?"

"I don't know where to find him; that's what I writ that note to ye for. It's be easier ter find a needle 'n a hay mow 'n ter find a man in New York, I guess. I don't know where Joe lives. Joe used ter write, often at first, but lately, wal, we hain't heered from Joe for a long time now, not for months. I thought you'd know where ter find him. I got word t'-day t' Joe was—Joe ain't sick, is he?"

"No, Joe is well."

"I can't go back ter them that love him without some word from Joe, 'n I'm goin' ter take him with me, 'f—'f he'll go. Ye see, Miss, we're plain, every-day country folks; we hain't got much, you've got everything. You don't need Joe, 'n we do. Some how the old place ain't the same without the boy, 'n so—I've jest got ter find him! I'll find him if I tramp the city over 'n over again; if Joe's deserted us all, I've got ter know it."

Rose knew that she must tell the old man that Joe was here—in the next room—but she wanted to throw her arms around his neck, and tell him of her loneliness and her love. To call Joe would mean, perhaps, to give him up. How could she?

"Don't blame me, Mr. Morton," said she. "I didn't try to take Joe from you; surely he had the right to make a position for himself in the world. What right had you, or anybody, to stand in his way? Joe is going to be the junior partner in my father's business."

"What did he want t' he hadn't got? Happiness? Faith loved him! Yes, 'n he loved her. What's he goin' "

ter get here that's better? Money? Faith's goin' ter be rich; the money 'll be his'n as much as her's, 'n he 'll have all I've got. 'F he wanted work, Lord knows, there's 'nough on 't ter home! It's a mighty poor trade he's made, I k'n tell ye! He's given up honest love, the home where he was born, pure air 'n bright sunshine; he's given up everything, 'n Lord! all for what?

"I daresay you are right, Mr. Morton. I would gladly give up all I have for what you say Joe has sacrificed."

"Ye would?"

"Yes, gladly; I've had little happiness in all this. I wish I could persuade you that I am not—at least—not much to blame; but it is too late to change things now." Rose looked at the ring on her finger.

"Too late—how?"

"What if Joe loves me, Mr. Morton?"

This was just what the farmer had feared most to hear; for once gossip was true, then.

"I can't believe it," said he. "He was engaged ter Faith; they growed up together, he for her 'n she for him, and"——

"This is his ring." Rose would have given anything in the world not to hurt this pleading man, but she was fighting—not against him—but against Fate, for her own happiness.

"That ring don't mean any more than the foundation of the house that was goin' ter be built for them ter be happy in; but now—the weeds are growin' over it till ye can't see it!"

"I am sorry!" There were tears in her eyes.

"N ye won't give him up?"

"I can't do that!" But Sid was not beaten yet.

"Why not? You can't love him as Faith does? **They**

growed up together—grewed up from babies ter playmates, 'n from playmates ter sweethearts; there ain't a stick or stone or tree, on the old place, that don't know that; there wasn't nothin' between 'em t'll you came. I ain't blamin' ye any more 'n I k'n help, but can't ye see 't she has the first right to him? Why she's hisn'n 'n he's her's, jest as much as if God had jined 'em tergether—that's the way *I* feel.

"But suppose that you are mistaken, Mr. Morton. If Joe has changed his mind; men do, sometimes, Mr. Morton. If I were to tell you that *I* love Joe, and that this love is my only hope for honest happiness, for an honest life, what would you say?"

"Lord! I don't know! I don't know! And the farmer began to see that this girl was to be pitied, too, perhaps.

"What would your Faith say?"

"If Joe loved you, 'n you loved Joe, 'n she was sure 'of it?"

"Yes?"

"She'd jest fall on her knees, 'n pray with all her soul for both on ye ter be happy. That's what Faith 'd do."

"Then your Faith is a far better woman than I. I couldn't do that. Does she know that you were coming to me?"

"Lord, no! She'd jest die 'er shame! I said ter myself, say's I, I'll go 'n find Joe, 'n I'll make an appeal, maybe 'tain't too late, 'n to-day I heered 't Joe was in trouble"— But Rose wasn't listening.

"And now—you ask me to give up—to another whom I have never even seen, all that I have to hope for."

"Not if Joe truly loves ye, I don't. 'F that's so, it is too late!

"Oh! I can't give it all up! I can't!" It was the cry from a slaved soul, that had known freedom for one brief moment, and must go back to the old bonds, perhaps worse.

"I'll go!"

"Wait! Wait a moment. One thing I will promise; Joe shall have plenty of time to know his own heart. *If*—if he does not love me truly, and with all his heart—I will give him up."

"I couldn't ask ye ter do any more. Good-night, Miss." Rose clung blindly to a chair for support. It was a moment of temptation, and a moment for sacrifice; temptation to let this sorrowing old man go forth without seeing his son, at least till she could speak with Joe again, and hear from his lips that he loved her; but the thought of that other—of Faith—and she put temptation from her.

"Wait! You—want—to—see Joe. He is here!"

"Here! Then Joe shall tell me for himself if there ain't any hope! Where is he?"

"I'll tell him—that—his father is here," said Rose.

CHAPTER XXII.

"A DAMNED LIE."

"It's a lie, I say! A damned lie!"

The door from the dining-room was flung violently open, and Joe, staggering with drink and flaming with angry passion, half fell from one room to the other, Dunham and Edgeley following.

"Joe!"

"Father!"

The farmer heard and saw. He heard the first oath he had ever known to come from Joe's lips, and saw drunkenness in features and limbs; but he looked beyond, and saw the face of Dunham. Joe staggered to a chair, and with its aid held himself erect. For a moment no one spoke, the farmer standing in the middle of the room, like a figure of rock.

"Don't—don't—tell *him!*" said Joe, at last, to Dunham and Edgeley.

"Don't tell him? Don't tell him *what?*"

The farmer waited a moment for a reply.

"Can't ye find yer tongues, any of ye? Can't ye speak? What's wrong here?"

"Wait—wait!" said Joe, piteously; "wait till to-morrow. There's some mistake—I can't set it right now—I'm"—Joe staggered, caught at the chair, and fell into it. The veins on neck and face stood out like threads of muscle. Joe was making an awful effort to regain command of brain and body."

"Very sorry for this, Morton," said Dunham; "your son is a little worse for liquor; I don't think he expected to see you."

"Well, who gave it to me!" Joe got to his feet.

"Who taught and urged me to use it? You! You! You! But I'm not drunk enough to believe that I'm a thief! Oh! If that cursed wine were out of my brain"——

"Thief! Father! What has happened—what's wrong?" said Rose, remembering curious things that both Edgeley and her father had said to her to-night.

"Thief! And a son of mine! Who says so?"

"I do!" said Dunham.

"And I say it's a lie! Rose—you don't believe; Father, you don't think that I—that I could take what doesn't belong to me?"

"No! It don't run in *your* blood, Joe!" said the sturdy old man, looking straight into Dunham's eyes.

"Believe me, Mr. Morton," said Dunham, "you can't be sorrier than I am that this has happened; I have done everything, as my partner Edgeley will tell you, to advance Joe's interests. He was to have become the junior partner in our firm with the new year. I will do all I can to shield him, but the law must take its course."

"Never mind your sympathy, Mark Dunham; what's he done?" said the farmer.

"Taken five thousand dollars that doesn't belong to him," said Dunham.

"I don't b'leeve ye! Ye may have taught him ter forget home, 'n them that love him best, but ye couldn't teach him ter steal! Come Joe, come with me! Come back to *them*!"

"No! I'll stay here, and fight it out!"

"You can go, Mr. Morton, but he can't," said Dunham, striking a bell.

"Who's goin' ter stop him?" said the farmer, thrusting his old soft hat into his pocket and buttoning his coat.

"Father! What are you going to do?" asked Rose.

"Tell that man in the library that I am ready for him," said Dunham to the butler. "There is a warrant for his arrest; it must be served."

"Miss Dunham—Rose—I beg of you to retire; this will be very disagreeable for you," said Edgeley.

"I wish none of your advice, Mr. Edgeley. Father—wait! There is some error—some mistake—tomorrow"——

"To-night! Don't interfere, Rose; there is no mistake, and this does not concern you," said Dunham, angrily.

"Not concern me? But it does concern me! This is his pledge upon my finger, I love him and I'll stand by him, whether he be guilty or innocent."

"Not with my consent."

"Without it then! And I don't believe your accusation."

"Peters—there's your man, take him!" said Dunham, to the officer in citizen dress.

"Stop! If ye take him ye take me!" And the farmer stood between Joe and arrest.

"Take my advice, sir," said the officer, quietly, and with respectful tone, "don't make trouble. You'll make it harder for him and you'll make it a good deal harder for me," and Peters looked at the strong figure of the angry old man. Then he turned to Joe. "Are you ready?"

"Yes, I'm ready!" said Joe.

"So 'm I!" said Joe's father, "I'm goin' with ye, Joe. I don't know much 'bout yer laws or your ways 'n I don't know what you're drivin' at, Mark Dunham; but I k'n guess you're a dumbled rascal, 'n ye'll find out 't there's a fight or two left in me 'f I am an old man! Just remember that, will ye? Come on!"

The old man pulled his hat tightly on and led the way to the door, Joe, a prisoner in the hands of Peters, following.

The odds against Joe and his father were very heavy and circumstances favored might more than right; for the next morning Joe, who had not been taken to jail, but had spent the night with Peters guarding him, in a comfortable down-town hotel, was in a raging fever and too ill to be removed. The doctors said physical and nervous prostration and advised hospital, but the farmer said: "No! home!"

Dunham, wanting "restitution and settlement out of court," had his way. The farmer would have given his life to save Joe's good name, so he sent a telegram to the village lawyer, who came at once, and he gave his notes, secured by mortgage, to satisfy Dunham and release Joe from the grip of the law. When Joe was able to be moved, "the Squire" and Sid, gentle as women, took the boy home.

"No time for fight now, that'll come later," the village lawyer said to Dunham.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"OF THE NIGHT FOR THE MORROW."

"THE Street" never knew the history of Joe's illness and return to the farm; Sid and Weasel knew how to keep their own counsel.

The springtime came while Joe was recovering, and the street was in busy consideration of the "Granny White will case"; there wasn't a gossip "who hadn't felt it in his bones that them Dunhams war'nt up here for nothing when they boarded out at Jackson's."

Dunham was going to break the will, and the day set for the trial in the county court house down at the center had arrived. It was a holiday in the street; planting in the fields and household duty was suspended; Sos' Warner posted a notice on the village post office and store, stating that "customers could get their mail after the folks got back from the trial"; the district school was closed for the day. Men folks in Sunday-go-to-meetin' clothes sat on fences and whittled opinions concerning the merits of the case; "wimmen folks" ran over to the neighbors to express their minds and hope it wouldn't rain cats 'n dogs 'n spoil best bonnets; everybody was going to the trial. Dunham and the girl were stopping at the hotel down at the center with lawyers brought all the way from New York, but everybody guessed that Weasel Clapp was sharp enough to hoe his own row; nobody ever got much the best of Weasel; and Sid Morton

wasn't the sort er man to give up while he had a dollar. The excitement was universal.

Stuttering Sim and Medad were helping with the spring work at the farm, but there was no thought of labor to-day.

Medad, with hair abundantly greased and brushed, boiled shirt, and best pants rolled half way to the knees, stood with one foot on the old chopping block at the wood shed door vigorously blacking his high-topped, cowhide boots, and having trouble with Sim. The irate Sim, in undershirt, and trousers with suspenders hanging, was gyrating around the block and Medad like an angry hornet.

"Go 'way f'm here! Go 'way," said Medad, "or I'll lam ye, sure 's guns!"

"G—g-g-gim'me mer shirt!" shouted Sim.

"I hain't got yer shirt!" said Medad.

"Ye, l—l-l-lie ye have! G—g-g-got it on!" said Sim.

"Wal! What ye goin' ter do 'bout it?" asked Medad, with tones that invited provocation from Sim.

"I'll sh—sh-show ye!"

"Serves ye darn good 'n right!" said Medad, "ye would go 'n hire a livery rig ter take Het Smith ter court with, wouldn't ye? Ye sneak! Wal! Ye won't take no gal er mine ter see the Dunham will case tried, I kin tell ye! Het Smith kin do 's she darn pleases, but 'f she goes with you she'll have ter wash 'n iron a shirt for ye, 'n there ain't time ter do that."

"G—g-g-gim'me that shirt!" Sim was nearly crying from excess of anger. Medad was all of one foot taller and fifty pounds heavier than Sim.

"Ger way!" was all the satisfaction Sim got, as Medad returned to the blacking and saturated his brush.

"D—d-d-darn you!" Sim came a trifle closer to Medad than he really meant to, threatening to strike him. Medad deftly drew the wet end of the shoe brush across Sim's face. That was the end of discretion and the beginning of valor on both sides. They clinched, tried leg locks, half Nelsons, grape vines, and all the other wrestler's tricks known professionally and some that were quite unprofessional. They got each other down and continued the contest in the dirt. They bit, gouged, scratched, kicked, clumsily punched each other, and, as far as lack of breath would allow, talked at each other incessantly. The dog ran out of the kitchen and barked at them, the roosters crowed with ruffled neck feathers and wings spread, as the belligerents rolled about the yard. The farmer, in the house struggling to get into his Sunday clothes and not in the best of temper, ran to the door.

"Here! Now boys, boys! Stop it! Ain't ye 'shamed 'er yerselves!" said Sid, struggling to get a collar on. But the boys didn't hear him, and the dog, encouraged by Sid's presence, threatened to attack them both, evidently thinking that he ought to share in the general entertainment.

"Gosh! I'll show ye!" said Sid, going to the well for a full pail of water that stood under the spout and drenching them thoroughly, as he would stop a dog fight. Tige stopped barking and walked away to worry a stray hen; he knew it was all over when the water came, the farmer had stopped him the same way many a time.

"There! Take that, yer pups!" said Sid.

They took it and broke apart, but as they did so Sim managed to get a good grip on the cause of all the trouble,

and when they parted Sim had the starched bosom of his own shirt and Medad had the rest.

"Sim, I'm ashamed on ye!" said Sid.

"He hit me f—f—first!" said Sim, waving the bosom.

"Ye lie, I didn't!" said Medad.

"Ye d—d—d—did!" said Sim.

"I didn't!"

"Ye d—d—d—did!"

"Didn't!"

"D—d—d—did! G—g—g—guess I know m—mer own shirt when I s—s—s—see it!"

"There, there! Quit yer foolin'!" said Sid.

"Medad, you go 'n hitch up, it's time for us ter be startin'; it's five miles down ter court house. 'F ye don't stop yer foolin', I'll fire ye both! Sim, go 'n help Abby put lunch into the buggy! I'll find work 'nough ter keep ye busy, by thunder!" Sid returned the pail to its proper place and filled it again. Medad and Sim at opposite sides of the yard glowered at each other.

"Wal!" said Medad.

"W—w—wal!" said Sim, each quite ready to renew the conflict, when Abby appeared at the kitchen door with a gallon jug.

"Hetty wants somebody ter draw the cider 'n fill this jug," said she. Sim and Medad raced to the jug and stuck in the narrow door, and the old cause for contest was lost in a new one.

"Lord, lord! If ye want anythin' done 'n this world, do it yerself!" said Sid, who didn't mean literally whaf he said; he was advising himself.

"Won't be any peace t'll Het makes up 'er mind 'n takes one on 'em," said Abby.

"Guess I'll have ter hitch the horses in myself," said Sid, going to the barn.

"Wal, there's all creation ter do 'n nobody ter help!" said Abby, "I'm so 'cited I don't know which end my head's on! I wonder where Faith is?"

"Faith, with her arms full of the first blossoms of May, was coming up from the meadows, and at the lower end of the lane, by the old turnstile, Joe was waiting for her.

In outward appearance it was the same Joe who had stood here a year and a half before, and declared for ambition rather than love. He wore the same old jumper, made of blue jeans, open at the throat, and sleeves rolled half to the elbows; overalls of the same material, whitened at the knees from long wear and repeated cleaning, and tucked into the tops of stout boots. His face, throat and arms, were browned by the wind and sun. There was nothing from the tailor about this Joe, and one might go far to find a manlier figure. Faith thought so, as she climbed the hill, and saw him leaning over the turnstile talking to the faithful old dog and, perhaps, waiting for some one. Now Faith had been as shy as a wood bird since Joe's recovery; they had scarcely been alone together, she and Joe, and the past had never been referred to; she didn't want it spoken of. It was happiness just to have Joe at home again; to see him dig, delve, and work from morning till night, as if he enjoyed it, and to hear the farmer singing, "Praise God, from whom," once more. She wondered if Joe was waiting for her, and she remembered the last time they stood at that same old turnstile with the wall between them. Joe had not seen her yet, she thought, and she sat down in the shade of the sassafras trees, waiting for Joe to go;

it was such a long way to the house by any other path. But Joe was talking to the dog, and in no hurry to go. The dog sat on his haunches, listening, with lips tightly closed and looking judicial.

"You see, it was this way, old fellow: I was a young fool, and thought I knew my own mind the last time I stood here, but I didn't, or what there was of it wasn't worth knowing. I wanted fight, and I got it! You understand, don't you?" and the dog wagged himself. "I wanted fight, and I got unmercifully licked. I've lost a whole year and a half, at least, and maybe I've lost things that I can never get back again. What would you do, Tige? What would you say to Faith?"

At the mention of Faith's name the dog was on his feet, with nose in the air, and sniffing the wind; he ran a couple of zigzags across the side hill, and then located Faith. With loud barking, he betrayed her hiding place, and would not be content till he saw her coming up the hill to the turnstile.

"I'm waiting for you, Faith," said Joe.

"For—me?"

"Yes, I haven't thanked you for nursing me back to life, for one thing"——

"Don't speak of that, Joe."

"I must! You didn't know it, but you saved me in spite of myself; I didn't care to live."

"Joe!"

"Don't think me ungrateful for all you've done, though I haven't said anything. I know that I didn't deserve it, but—I want you to believe that I am not ungrateful to *you*."

"I do, Joe."

"You didn't let me want for anything. It isn't always

medicine that cures when a chap is sick. I can remember every touch of your cool hands and the restful sound of your voice when you read to me."

"You were very near to death, Joe."

"I knew it, with only *you* between us. I wasn't worthy of all you did, Faith."

"You musn't say that, you mustn't think it!"

"Yes, I must! I've made so many mistakes—I wonder if life is long enough to correct them?"

"All things come to him who waits," said Faith, in a voice that could just be heard.

"Not all, some wrongs can't be made right."

"Then they must be forgotten."

"Even my wrong to you?"

"That was—forgiven—long ago!"

"But your forgiveness can't make me forget; seems to me that wrong never dies, it just lives on—forever!"

"Atonement that could be made in a moment would be too easy, wouldn't it, Joe? There wouldn't be any lesson learned, can't you feel that?"

"Yes, sometimes. I didn't used to think so, but I do now."

"And aren't you happier?"

"I should be, if I could undo the past."

"Make it a stepping-stone to the future."

"It's the future I'm thinking of, Faith. I am strong and well now, and I must go away again."

"Joe! Go—away—again! You don't mean that, Joe!"

"Not because I wish to, this time; that's all changed, too. I *must*!"

"Why *must* you go?"

"Because it is my duty. I must earn money, the money for the mortgage that father gave to that rascal, Dunham.

You see, Faith, there are a lot of expensive consequences to my folly, but I'll never rest till I've proved that I didn't take what wasn't mine. I don't see how it all happened; I wanted to succeed, but they wouldn't let me. I didn't care for dissipation; it was forced upon me."

"Father says it was to tie up the farm, and keep him from defending the will"——

"Yes, I know! They have used me to rob you, Faith! I must find some way to undo it all."

"I don't blame you, Joe."

"I wish you would, I deserve it!"

"Good will come of it yet."

"I don't see how."

"I am sure of it!"

"Do you remember those lines you read to me, when I was ill, 'The desire of the moth for the star?' I was a fool! I wanted the wrong things"——

"You wrong yourself, Joe; besides, you forget the next line, 'Of the night for the morrow!'"

"Mother used to say that failures were the stepping-stones to success. I wonder if that is true."

"She'd tell you so now, if she were alive."

"I wish I could ask her advice now. I can't go to father, he doesn't understand me, and that makes everything so much harder. He just tells me what a fool I've been, as if I didn't know it better than anybody else!"

"You think about it too much, Joe."

"You wouldn't say so, if you knew all."

"I *know*"——

"No, you don't! I haven't told father—and—I *couldn't* tell you."

"You mean—Rose?"

"You do know!"

"Yes. She told your father that night when—the night that you were arrested. She stood up for you—against her father—because she—loved—you."

"I wonder if that was part of the trick," said Joe, half to himself.

"Don't! Don't! You mustn't say these things to me, Joe! They hurt me. Your honor is at stake."

"But suppose that all my happiness, and the happiness—of others—depended upon my breaking my word to Rose Dunham, what should I do? I don't love *her*, Faith."

"But she—loves—you. I know that from the letters she wrote."

"She—wrote—to you?"

"Often; while you were ill."

"Then—you watched and tended me—for *her* sake?"

"Yes! You must keep your word, Joe; you can't do anything dishonorable. Promise me?"

"I'll do my duty, Faith; but I wish you couldn't forgive me so easily. I think father's anger does me more good, and hurts less. What an awful mess of it I've made! If you only knew!" Joe took her hand.

"Stop! Stop, Joe! You mustn't say any more. I can't listen to you!" and Faith took her hand from him.

"Father was right! I sold myself for a mess of pottage. Give me one of those flowers, Faith?"

"It wouldn't be right, Joe."

"Just as a token that you—forgive me." Faith gave them all to him, and ran all the way to the house.

"God bless her!" said Joe. "I'll win yet!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

"MORTGAGED."

"WHY, what's the matter, dearie? What ye cryin' for?" said Sid, as Faith ran into the yard, and threw herself down on the seat under the old tree.

"I'm not crying, and it's all for nothing," said Faith, with ambiguous contradiction.

"Ben talkin' ter Joe?" Faith nodded.

"I thought so; there's nothin' but sorer followin' him!"

"Father, you mustn't talk like that about Joe! He's your own son!"

"Wal, he's my flesh 'n blood, so we had ter stand by him, but I can't forgive him for what he's done ter you."

"Please, father! Don't be too hard with Joe; I don't believe he was to blame. If I can forgive him, can't you?"

"Wal, I've tried ter live up ter the good book. I've killed the fatted calf, I've mortgaged every stick 'n stone of the old place, ter git Joe out 'er trouble. I wanted you 'n Joe ter have 't all, but it'll have ter go, if Dunham says so."

"Can he take everything?"

"Every blessed thing."

"Can he take—that?" and Faith pointed to the moss-covered stones of the foundation, that the old man had said meant more than the diamond ring.

"Yes, even the foundation for the new home. Joe's home 'n yours, the house that never'll be built. It'll all have ter go!" And the farmer turned away, that Faith might not see his emotion.

"Can't you use my money, father?"

"No! 'n I wouldn't 'f I could! Besides, 'f the case goes agin us ter day, 'n probably 'twill, you won't have any money."

"I shall not be sorry, father. It has brought nothing but unhappiness to all of us."

"I shouldn't care myself, if 'twould give ye back the happiness 't Joe's robbed ye of. That's what I can't forgive him for!"

"You *must*! Forget and forgive!"

"I know I'd oughter, the good book says so, but ye see, Faith, there's so much old Adam in the Morton family 't we can't always run a straight furre. I'll try, I promise ye that, but I couldn't take any of your money. One Morton's robbed ye—that's enough."

"Humph, I should say so!" said Abby, putting the jug of cider on the kitchen doorstep, "but I don't see any use 'n talkin' 'bout it. Con—sid—er Morton! What d' ye wanter do, git yer death er cold? 'Spose ye want the as'my 'n tic-duleroo, 'n keep me up all night tendin' ye? Don't ye know 't yer set'n out there with yer slippers 'n no collar on? It just takes me all 'er my time ter keep this house straight, 'n I'm tired out! You come right in this minit, 'n let me fix ye up!" Sid went into the house with Abby.

Faith wondered how it would all end, and wished that she, too, was a man like Joe, with strong hands for any toil, that she, too, might go out into the world and do something to lift the burden from the shoulders of that

sweet, great-hearted old man, who had been more than a father to her—Joe's father.

"How d' do, Faith," said the lawyer, who had come into the yard in his own quiet way. Nobody ever heard Weasel coming; he was not the man to make a noise in the world.

"Oh, you're the just the person I wanted to see!" said Faith. "Is it true that the case will go against us to-day?"

"I'm afraid it is," said the lawyer. "That rascal Dunham has been spending money right and left, and I don't think much of the jury. The case ought to be appealed, but Dunham's got Sid tied up so with that mortgage, and appeal means a lot of money. If we appeal, Dunham 'll foreclose, and turn you all out of house and home."

"Then we musn't appeal!" said Faith.

"Yes, we must," said the lawyer; "I've got a plan"——

"To help father?"

"Yes; if the old place is put up for sale somebody 'll buy it. I've got some money that isn't doing any good—so—I thought"——

"That you could buy it, and I could pay you back for it when we 've won the case?"

"Well, together—we might"——

"We will!"

"'Twould be mighty hard for Sid—and Abby—to start new at their time of life." Faith did not notice a curious inflexion in the lawyer's voice, as he included Abby in his sympathy. She was thinking of something else.

"Then nobody else could build on Joe's foundation?" said she.

"Huh?" Weasel did not understand.

"I—I was only thinking," said Faith, hoping that she had not betrayed herself.

"Maybe we can think a way out of it," said the lawyer. "Aunt Abby's well, I s'pose?" This time Faith did notice; she turned and looked at the 'Squire, who had simply inquired after Abby's health, but with intonation that meant deeper interest to Faith, though she could not discover that he was conscious of it.

"Would you like to see her? I'll call her," said Faith; "and I'll tell you a secret, Mr. Clapp. Folks think that Aunt Abby is a hard, cross-grained old maid, but she isn't; she's the dearest, sweetest, softest hearted thing in the world—when nobody's looking—and—and—don't you stop thinking!" Faith kissed him, and ran into the house, just as the fixed up farmer came out.

"How are ye, Sid?"

"Wal, we ain't very chipper, Square," said Sid, putting the jug into the buggy.

"Hain't seen Dunham, have ye?"

"Yes, I have. Dunham drove up last night to see me, after dark. He still talks compromise; that makes me think that he knows there's a weak spot in his case somewhere."

"What d' ye tell him?"

"Told him he couldn't compromise with *me*!"

"What d' he say 'bout the mortgage?"

"Won't renew."

"Foreclose?"

"Yes, if you can't meet the notes."

"It'll go hard to leave the old place. I was born in that house, Joe was born there; my mother 'n Joe's mother are sleeping under the wild flowers, over there. There

ain't a foot 'er ground 't I hain't nursed 'n tended t'll seem 's if I was part of it; 'n by 'n by, when I'm done with livin,' I wanter be laid away over there, too, with the same flowers over me. But I couldn't rest with strangers here"——

"The Lord 'll provide, Sid; we've got his promise."

"I know it, Square, I know it! 'N you've been mighty good ter us, yerself," said Sid, shaking hands with the lawyer.

"Just neighborly, Sid, that's all. How's Joe getting on?"

"Workin' like a beaver, from sun-up till dark!"

"That's good. The boy's got stuff in him."

"He's drained that old sink of a south medder, 'n made sixteen acres 'ov the best hay land ye ever saw 'n yer life," said the farmer, proudly.

"Say anything?"

"Not a word, jest works."

"Work's good for him."

"He'll have to do a lot of it ter make up for what's past!"

"Don't be too hard, Sid; I wish you'd take him by the hand, and say, 'Joe, let's forget.'"

"I can't, Square! I wanter, but I can't! 'A good name is rather ter be chosen than great riches.' Joe forgot that."

"It's your duty."

"I know it, Square, but doin' duty 's harder work 'n drainin' medders!"

"He's your own boy, and he's a good deal like you."

"I s'pose he is."

"He's a chip of the old block. You must allow for

that. What do you suppose his mother would hev done?"

"She 'd 'er taken him in 'er arms, 'n cried over him, 'n never said another word!"

"Wal, Sid, that's just what you ought to do!" and the lawyer saw that Sid was softened. He saw Joe coming through the apple orchard, and he waited. Joe came nearer, saw his father, stopped, and would have turned back; but at that moment Sid saw him. "Joe!" There was a tone in his father's voice that brought Joe to his side.

"Joe—Joe—I—I"—

"Father!" The lawyer turned his back to them.

The old man took Joe by the hand. They looked into each other's eyes for a second, then the old man tried to say something and couldn't, but he put his arm over Joe's shoulder and around his neck, and together they walked, slowly, silently, up to the gate that opened into the lane. Faith came to the door, but the lawyer met her, with finger on his lips, and she stole back into the house again. Weasel hid himself in the woodshed, thinking that things would go a little easier now.

"Don't want to disturb you, Sid, but Dunham will be here any minute now, and we'd better decide what we're going to do about that mortgage," said the lawyer, as he came out of the shed, five minutes later.

"Mark Dunham—coming here!" said Joe.

"I can't raise five thousand dollars to pay the notes. If he won't renew, he'll have ter take the place," said Sid.

"Father, has it come to that?"

"Yes, Joe, it's come ter that!"

"It shan't; 'it isn't right, it's robbery!"

"Yes—but it's law," said Weasel.

"There's something higher than law, and that's justice! If he dares to touch a stick or stone of ours, I'll smash"—

"Steady, Joe, steady! Don't make things worse," said the lawyer.

"That's right. They're bad 'nough now, Lord knows!" said Sid.

"I've got a score to settle with Mark Dunham, when my turn comes. You shouldn't have given him that mortgage!" said Joe.

"'N let a boy 'er mine go ter jail for use'n money 't didn't belong 't him?"

"Yes, 'twould have served me right—if 'twas true—but it wasn't true," said Joe.

"Too late ter talk 'bout that now!" said Sid.

"It isn't too late! Do you think that I am going to let a lie hang over me always? I was a fool, and"—

"And we 've got ter pay for it," said the farmer, finishing Joe's sentence.

"Gosh a mighty! Say, Sid, them Dunhams 'er drivin' down the lane; comin' here sure," said Medad, at the gate.

"Ye'd better keep out 'er the way, Joe," said Sid; "we won't want new trouble ter take care on."

"No! I'll stay here and face him. I know him better than you do," said Joe. "I know some things about his business that may be useful. He'll lie about me, sure! And I'm going to *hear* what he says."

"Joe's right," said the lawyer.

"Goodness gracious! Joe Morton, ye ain't goin' ter the trial with them duds on, be ye?" said Abby, at the door.

"They're good enough—but I'm not going—and there

may not be a trial to-day," said Joe, feeling of his arms.

"Land sakes alive! What's up now, I'd like 't know! How d' do, 'Squire!"

"How d' do, Miss Abby," said Weasel.

"He's a-comin'," said Medad, at the gate.

"We've got a little business to attend to, Miss Abby.

"Dunham is here about the mortgage. I wish you'd kinder keep Faith out of sight, will ye?"

Abby went in, and the men waited for Mark Dunham.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE TRIAL.

"GOOD morning, gentlemen," said Dunham. "Fear I'm a trifle late. Fine weather for farming; your land looks well, Morton, great improvement reclaiming that meadow." Dunham did not see Joe—the big tree was between them.

"Mr. Dunham, you've come here on a matter of business, 'n the sooner it's over the better we sh'l like it," said the farmer.

"All right! If you had accepted my first offer, it would have saved a great deal of expense and trouble," said Dunham.

"Ye mean 'bout the will?"

"Yes."

"Guess we won't talk 'bout that. You've come 'bout the mortgage."

"Why can't we settle both at once—now?"

"We can, if you'll withdraw your claims," said the lawyer.

"Impossible!" said Dunham. "We are going to win our case to-day. Of course you can appeal, but that will cost money. Now, I'll make a fair proposition!"

"What d' ye call a fair proposition?" asked Sid.

"Divide the legacy, and I will give you the mortgage and discontinue the suit. Here is your mortgage"——

"What! Rob that little girl 'er mine? No *sir*! Not ter

save myself from the poor house!" People who thought Sid wouldn't give in while he had a dollar were right. He wouldn't give in while he had life.

"Come, come! You are not in a position to say what you will or won't do."

"Wall, I'll keep doin', just the same!"

"Can you meet your notes? Can you take up this mortgage?"

"No! But ye ain't goin' ter sell the house 'n home over our heads, are ye? Ye couldn't be so mean 's that!"

"Your notes were due yesterday; can you meet them?"

"No!"

"Well, business is business, and you must entertain my proposition!"

"Not while I've got hands ter work with!"

"Not while he has a friend to stand by him!" said Weasel, with his eyes snapping.

"And you won't compromise? I ask you for the last time!" said Dunham.

"No *siree*! I won't help you to commit a crime! Go ahead, 'n do yer darndest!" Sid was full of fight.

"If you won't listen to reason, you must take the consequences. You'll talk differently when your friends know that your son was false to his trust; that I stood between him and prison!"

"That's a lie!" said Joe, facing Dunham.

"You!" For a moment Dunham was pale with angry surprise.

"I say that's a lie, and you know it!"

"You stole the funds of the firm!"

"You can't prove that," said Joe.

"It's too late now to conceal facts, and they are going to be told!"

"Facts!" said Joe, contemptuously. "Facts! You never gave the facts a chance; you lied to me at the beginning, and you've lied all through. You're lying now. You had me arrested, but you didn't dare to let me stand trial, that wouldn't have suited your purpose; you got what money you could out of a confiding old man, and then set me free, with a blackened name, but my turn will come!"

"Careful, young man; we can reopen that case," said Dunham, threateningly.

"Do it! I dare you to do it! Give me a chance in court to explain some of your business methods, and I'll clear myself. You used me to serve your purpose, and that's where you made a mistake!"

"The same old mistake," said Dunham, "of confidence misplaced and gratitude forgotten. Your pace was too fast, too many cards, too much wine, and—all the rest of it. Remarkable career for a country boy, with a few months' experience, and a few hundreds a year!"

"You urged me to it, you took advantage of my ignorance, and gave me a taste for those things. You taught me to gamble, to drink, to live beyond my means, and you gave me the money to do it with."

"And if I choose to deny all this?"

"You can't! It's true!"

"But I do deny it! For Rose's sake, I stood between you and your errors; now, I simply want my own. Don't be a fool, Joe!"

"I won't! I've done with all that. You made me turn my back on all that was good and true; you've stolen from me good name, friends, honor—everything worth living for; but I'll be even with you, as sure as there's God above us!"

"Be patient, Joe," said his father, "it'll all come out right, somehow."

"Put me in the witness-box to-day, I'll tell what I know," said Joe.

"Then you'll simply waste your breath," said Dunham. "You can't oppose character, business integrity and influence. You had better accept my conditions. You can't fight the case without money. This mortgage ties your hands," said Dunham, turning from Joe to the farmer.

"Not quite so hard as you think, Mr. Dunham," said the lawyer. "I made that will, and I don't like to see it broken. I'll take this case on my own responsibility. There are no mortgages on me, and I've got money enough to fight as long as you can."

"Ye mustn't do that, Weasel. I can't let ye," said Sid.

"Hold on, Sid," said Weasel, "this isn't your business now! It's Faith and mine!"

"Looks as though your stocks were falling, Mark Dunham," said Joe, and Dunham wondered if he'd got to fight the whole village.

"Come, let us talk it all over reasonably," said he, "continued litigation will cost us more than the property is worth; you know that. You know that I have a good case; a weak old woman, not in sound mind, leaves her property to a stranger, out of spite and to disinherit her own grandchild. I'll make any reasonable compromise; it really isn't worth fighting about, \$50,000 in money, and some deeds of played out Nevada mining lands, that are worthless"——

"Mining lands! Nevada! Not the old Phoenix?" shouted Joe.

"That's the name in the deeds," said the lawyer.

"Hurrah! I've got you now, you lying cheat! I've got you!" and Joe shook his clenched fist dangerously close to Dunham's face.

"Joe! Are ye crazy?" said his father.

"Crazy? No! I know the game now! Phoenix is going to be the richest mine in all the West, and Dunham knows it! I've kept my ears open—and maybe I warn't such a fool after all," and Joe danced for joy, as he remembered, for the first time since his trouble, that he still had the old stock bought from Edgeley.

"Is that true, Mark Dunham?" asked the lawyer.

"Yes, it is true. Those deeds control the entire mine. Now you know the kind of a fight you are in for. I offer you compromise. For the last time—once for all—will you"——

"No!" said Sid, in tones that made the echoes heard.

"Very well, we'll fight the case! Good morning!" Dunham turned to go, but the lawyer interfered.

"Wait a minute," said the lawyer. "Mr. Dunham, I've got a few words to say that may change your mind. We've got just time enough to say them before we start. Court doesn't set till two."

"I've no time to listen. My daughter is waiting. I've wasted too much time already," said Dunham, moving toward the lane. The burly farmer, with two steps, was between Dunham and the gate.

"Wal," said Sid, "she k'n wait a leetle longer! Fire away, Weasel! We'll try the case right here!" Weasel took his time about firing, and Dunham waited.

"Mr. Dunham, you swore you'd break this will, the will that was intended to make two young hearts a little happier," said Weasel.

"Rubbish! I don't know anything about hearts, and I don't care"——

"'N ye lied 'n schemed ter keep 'em apart, t'll ye nearly broke one 'n ruined the other!" said the farmer.

"Father!"

"Shet up, Joe! Yer father's talkin' now!"

"Well?" said Dunham.

"Well," continued Weasel, "to make your work easier you made up your mind to ruin those who would be likely to defend that little girl and her rights. You *knew* that a doting old father would give up his last cent to keep that colt of a boy out of trouble, so you laid your plans, and got some other rascals to help you."

"Indeed!" Dunham was on guard now.

"So much for your *business integrity*. Now as to character. Some years ago you betrayed and ruined Granny White's only daughter."

"That is a lie!" shouted Dunham. "I married her!"

"You did—after some time, long after your first child was born."

"It is a lie—a lie!"

"No, it isn't! I can prove all I say, and will, in court. You wanted the rich grandmother to forgive you, but she didn't; you wanted her money, and you planned a clever trick; you sent your second child—the first fruit of marriage—to be laid at the door of the lonely old grandmother, thinking that an innocent child might find a way into her heart. Your drunken tool made a mistake, and that babe was left, half dead from cold and hunger, at this very door."

"God God!" Dunham sank down on the seat by the tree, and hid his face in his hands. But the lawyer was merciless, and he continued:

"It lived! The only child who had a moral right to your name, and that is the child that you are trying to rob. The other—your daughter Rose—is the offspring of crime, and was born without the right to a name."

"Ah! God help me!" It was a cry of stifled horror, of swift, poignant anguish, and the involuntary prayer from a hopeless heart, all in one half breath. It came from Rose, who had, unseen, heard this accusation, and who saw confession in every feature of this man she had called father. Against his wishes she had come with Dunham, hoping that she might see Joe. She had never heard from Joe directly, since the night he had placed the ring upon her finger, but she wanted to tell him that she had been an unconscious accomplice in his downfall, and beg of him to hold her blameless. She had come to the gate, hoping to find the man she loved, and she had heard that which must forever stand between her and the love of any honest man.

"Rose!" She would have fallen if Joe had not gone quickly to her.

"Don't touch me!" she cried.

"You—heard?" said he.

"Every word." Dunham had risen when he heard the cry, and stood now like a felon, awaiting sentence.

"You should never have known this—there may be some mistake." With pity in his heart, Joe hoped so.

"It is too late to shield me now," said she. "I am beyond all sympathy." Then, going to Dunham, who would not look at her, she said:

"Tell me—*you!* Am I—the thing—he says?" Dunham could only whisper, hoarsely:

"Rose"——

"Answer me!"

"What he says—is true."

"You hear!" said she to the others, "and you shall hear what he can say—to *me*!"

"What can I say? You know the truth"—

"Discovered by an accident! You have kept this knowledge from me, to use me as your accomplice"—

"That's not true! As God's my judge"—

"I don't believe you! I will never believe you again; you have lied to me always, and you have made my life a lie to the world!"

"You were not to blame"—

"I know! I know! *I* am the victim of your guilt!"

"No one need know."

"Not know! You know, these good people know; *I* know what I am! Do you think that I can ever forget?"

"What is past can't be helped." Dunham was disposed to brave it out now.

"What is in my past cannot, but the wrong to these people can—and shall."

"Take care! You are still my daughter—and I"—

"No! I have called you father for the last time. I shall never speak that word again!"

"What are you going to do?"

"Right! Whatever the consequences. It was not Joe; it was you who robbed the firm. Edgeley has told me"—

"Curse you!"

"Justice now, justice!" If Joe had not interfered, Dunham would have struck the girl.

"Things seem kinder easier now," said the farmer.

"Looks like our turn to make propositions," said the lawyer. Rose sank to the seat, despairing.

"Well, what do you want?" said Dunham," and the lawyer knew that the fight was out of the man now.

"Restitution," said Joe.

"Give up what you got by fraud, and discontinue the suit," said the lawyer.

"No! I will not."

"Yes, you will!"

Dunham rose to his feet, and turned to face the lawyer, but what he saw froze the heart within him; his lips moved, but for a moment made no sound.

"My God! Look! Look there! The very image of"——

"Father! What is it; what is wrong?" It was Faith that Dunham saw; it was Faith who spoke, and came to the farmer, who took her in his arms, as if to protect her from evil, and hid her face.

"'Sh! You wouldn't understand, dearie! Come away! Come away!" said he.

"What's the matter, Mr. Dunham?" said Weasel; "sudden shock of some kind?"

"It's nothing! A little vertigo—that's all. And this—this is—your"——

"The child that you are trying to rob," said the farmer. My Faith and Joe's Faith. If there's any hope of mercy in ye, spare her!"

"For God's sake, don't tell"——

"Not if you make reparation," said the lawyer, quietly.

"I don't want my children to know—that—that I——. Here, I've lost, and you've won—I'll pay. The suit shall be discontinued."

Dunham was a pitiful thing to see, as he gave the mortgage to the village lawyer, looked at Rose, whose head was bowed with sorrowing shame and despair—then at

Faith. His lips opened, as if to speak again, but the words did not come, and he walked away, silently, blindly, out into the lane.

"Father, what did he mean by—his children?" said Faith.

"Dearie, somewhere in the world, Rose has—has a sister; *she'll* be a good deal happier for not knowin' she has such a father." Despair had found its antidote now, and Rose was sobbing, heart broken, but she understood the farmer's unspoken appeal. Faith must not know the truth.

"Go to her, dearie, go 'n comfort her a leetle, she needs a woman's sympathy now."

And Faith, with tears of pity in her own eyes, put her young arms around Rose, and dried her tears of sorrow. And the men stole silently away, to leave these two together.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE VILLAGE LAWYER MAKES AN INVESTMENT.

MARK DUNHAM kept his word. He drove from the deserted street to the crowded court house, instructed his lawyers to discontinue the case, and took the next train for New York. Rose, comforted by Faith, nursed by Abby, and gently pitied by the grateful old man, followed the next day. Sid and Joe went with her to the little station to say good-bye. The train took the girl out into the world—alone; but with Joe's ring still on her finger. She had not spoken, and Joe could not.

Sos' Warner's boy was at the station with the mail bag, saw the departure, and ran all the way back to the store with the news, and the gossips, after much calculation, guessed that Joe Morton and the Dunham gal had fallen out and fallen in again. This was the only reasonable excuse they could find for the discontinuance of the trial. They never discovered that while they were sweltering in the packed court-room the "trial" was proceeding to a most satisfactory conclusion, according to principles of equity and justice, in Sid Morton's back yard, five miles away; but it took them some weeks to recover from their disappointment, and cease their speculation concerning the future probabilities at the Morton farm.

Future probabilities at the Morton farm, however, were getting to be present facts in rather unexpected ways; not rapidly enough, however, to please Sid, for Joe and Faith

seemed to be no nearer together than before. Sid said nothing; he had learned his lesson; he knew better than to try to force hearts together. Sometimes he feared that, after all, Joe loved the wrong one, but he was silent.

The village lawyer was a daily visitor at the farm; the settlement of the will, future investment of Faith's legacy, as well as friendly interest, brought him often to confer—with Sid.

Meanwhile, Sid observed that Abby was growing sharper of tongue, and more uncertain in temper, from day to day; Abby always was "smarter 'n chain lightning," but lately, for some reason or other, things within Abby's radius of influence at the farm had to move with more celerity than ever before. In fact, Abby was just a little riled most of the time. Sid took Faith down to the lower end of the apple orchard, far from the house, and talked to her about it, but Faith only laughed. Faith was not afraid of Abby, and Sid was.

Hetty was a perfect antithesis—though a most provoking one—to Abby. Nothing ever moved Hetty—quickly—the house in flames wouldn't have done it. Hetty was temperamentally slow, but she understood Abby.

One summer morning, some weeks after the trial that didn't take place in the court house, Hetty was slowly lifting and dropping the long dasher in the tall wooden churn, that stood in a pail of cool water by the well. She had been "set to make the butter for the week," by Abby, but, with temperament and thinking combined, it seemed to Abby that Hetty was likely to be a week making it, and Abby decided that "'twas high time suthin' was done!"

"For land sake, do hurry up that churnin'!" said she. "that cream 'll be sour fore 't turns ter butter, 'n I've promised ter send some up ter Square Clapp's this after-

noon. No use 'n talkin', Hetty, you won't be worth a hill 'er beans t'll ye make up your mind ter take either Medad 'er Sim! One 'er tother on 'em's hangin' round most the time!"

"Yes'm! Guess they don't do all the hangin' 'round," drawled Hetty.

"What's that?" said Abby, sharply. "Who else hangs 'round, I'd like ter know?"

"Medad says 't Weasel Clapp ain't round here two 'er three times a week for nothin'."

"You just tell Medad ter mind his own business—'f he's got any!" said Abby.

"'N Sim says 't there ain't anybody 'n the village 'td make a smarter wife for Lawyer Clapp."

"Land sakes! Did Sim say that?" said Abby, instantly disarmed.

"Yes'm: 'N he said he'd bet a heifer 't you 'n the lawyer 'd hitch up double inside 've a year," said Hetty, pursuing her advantage.

"Wal, Sim ain't such a fool 's he looks! But Lor'! I hain't got no time ter think 'er such things 't my time 'er life, it's more 'n I k'n do ter take care 'er Sid 'n the rest on ye! Goodness gracious, 'f there ain't Mr. Clapp now—comin' down the lane! Comin' to see Sid, I s'pose," and Abby hastily rolled down her sleeves and took off her work apron. "Hetty, 's my front piece on straight? Wish I had time ter slip on my other dress!" But there wasn't time; the lawyer was at the gate, hesitating like a bashful school boy.

"Ah, good morning, Miss Abby!" said he.

"Why, good mornin', Mr. Clapp! Didn't 'xpect ter see you 'n this part the village—least—not 'fore Sunday, anyway!" Abby was flustered, and Hetty giggled.

"Well—ye see—I—I thought I'd drop around 'n see—Sid—a little while, 'n I didn't know but you might not be very busy—and"——

"Law, no! though there's always suthin' ter do, ye know. Won't ye set down?" Abby carefully dusted a chair with her apron, and sent Hetty into the house.

"Pshaw! Ye'd better. Stop 'n have some dinner. Sid's gone down t' git the old mare shod, 'n he'll have ter scratch gravel ter git home for dinner, I'm thinkin'."

"Oh, Sid ain't at home? Well—then—perhaps"——

Weasel knew Sid wasn't at home; he had seen Sid on his way to the Center, in the morning.

"Oh, ye mustn't go! Sid 'll want ter see ye!" said Abby. Weasel sat down.

"Rather glad Sid ain't here," said he. "Ye see—Miss Abby—I've been going ter speak to ye for some time. I—I'm going to ask you if"—— Weasel paused. Abby dropped into a chair.

"Good Lord, Mr. Clapp! Ye take my breath away!"

"S'pose you k'n send half a pound of butter more a week over 't my house?" Abby was on her feet instantly, and began to churn furiously.

"Oh!" was all she said, but she thought Weasel Clapp was "enough to tempt a saint." Weasel felt that he had said the wrong thing, and endeavored to recover lost ground.

"Of course," said he, "'f it's going to make you any trouble, don't do it."

"Humph! I don't mind *trouble*," said Abby, tartly.

"I should hate to use any butter but yours," said Weasel. Abby was pacified.

"Wal, I hope ye'll never have ter—that is—I—



It was coming now sure, she thought. She lifted the cover and looked into the churn to hide her nervousness.

p. 213

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wal"— Abby felt that she had said more than she meant to, but Weasel was encouraged.

"Don't s'pose anything could take ye away from your folks here, could it?" said he.

This was pretty direct, but Abby affected not to understand.

"Lord knows what Sid 'n the rest on 'em 'd do without *me!*" said she. "They hain't got nobody else ter depend on."

"Farming makes hard work, Miss Abby."

"Wal, I don't mind work, but I wouldn't mind a change now 'n then."

"Ain't ye kinder tired on 't?"

"Yes, I am! I'd git out on 't to-morrer, 'f I had the chance!" This was fact, not coquetry.

"No! Would ye?" said Weasel. It was coming now, sure, Abby thought. She lifted the cover and looked into the churn to hide her nervousness. "Cows dry up much this spring?" Weasel had balked again.

"Look here, Square! 'F you've got anythin' ter say, speak out 'n don't beat 'round the bush!" and Abby churned with great decision.

"Didn't mean ter rile ye, Miss Abby!"

"Lord! I ain't riled!"

Weasel went to her, took held of the dasher, intending to stop the churning till he could say what he came to say, but the churning was not to be stopped so easily. Weasel changed his action to a more helpful one, and the churning went on with four hands instead of two.

"Ye see," he continued, his words and thoughts divided or punctuated by the rhythmic rise and fall of the dasher, "I don't know—much about—this sort of thing—I mean—the sort of thing I came over—to see ye about."

Guess I'm more used to judge 'n jury, 'n they're a mighty sight easier to talk to, than a—I mean"—

"Wal, I swow!" Sid had driven quietly down the lane to the gate, and saw the lawyer and Abby, apparently wrestling with the churn dasher. At Sid's ejaculation of astonishment, Abby let go of the dasher.

"Wal! If I hain't forgot all about dinner!" and she ran into the house. Weasel would have been glad to run the other way, but he was caught, and he kept on churning, with mechanical awkwardness.

"Kinder new business for ye, ain't it, Square?" said Sid.

"Oh, no! no! I like it! Reminds me 've when I was a boy, 'n had to do the churnin'," said Weasel.

"Good 'n hot, ain't it?" said the farmer, sitting by the cool tree.

"Fine growing weather for corn." Weasel stopped churning, and sat by Sid. "Where's Joe?"

"Gone down 't post-office. He kinder 'xpects ter hear 'bout some stock he's got. Ye remember that feller Edgeley? Wal, he stuck Joe with it last winter. Joe's been writin' ter New York 'bout it."

"Wal! 'F I didn't forget all about that letter!" and Weasel began to explore his pockets. "I've got one—somewhere—for Joe. Sos Warner gave it to me to bring over, 'f I happened to be coming this way. Here 'tis."

"That's f'm New York," said Sid, reading the post-mark.

"Keep Joe away from the city, Sid," said Weasel.

"Guess he's got his eye teeth cut by this time."

"It's dangerous!"

"That's so, Weasel, that's so!" said Sid, "not 't I've got anythin' much agin the city; I've got jest Ebenezer

enough in me ter like it; but some folks ain't born up to it, I guess, 'n when a feller ain't born up to it he'd better let it alone! It's different with Joe, though, and he'll never be easy t'll he gits even with Dunham."

Sid had changed his mind about the city, and moreover, was shining with borrowed light nowadays. He could see that Joe's year in New York had wonderfully improved him. Other folks could see it too. Joe and the minister were great friends now, and when Joe put on his best clothes—made by the New York tailors—and went to meeting with his father, Sunday mornings, and everybody in church nudged the nearest neighbor, Sid was a proud man; and he took to himself some of the credit.

"Dunham ought to be serving ten years," said the lawyer.

"Wal, them's the sort that seem ter git along, derved 'f they don't!" said Sid. Thank God, 't I haven't got a dollar 'at I didn't earn honestly."

"There's one consolation," said Weasel, "he ain't livin' on our money."

"One thing worries me a good deal, lately," said Sid. "D' ye think we oughter tell Faith that Dunham's her father?"

"She doesn't know it?"

"No. At any rate she don't say anythin'. Rose Dunham didn't say a word, 'n she promised she never would. She said 'twas best Faith shouldn't know," said Sid.

"She can't be any happier for knowing," said the lawyer. "Dunham said not to tell her. I think he was honest about that. But I think we ought to do something about that land out in Nevada. If Dunham wasn't lying about it, maybe it's worth looking after. Joe thought so, you remember."

"I vum! That's so, Weasel! Let's talk ter Joe 'bout it. Square, you've been mighty good ter us in this matter!" said Sid, gratefully.

"Oh, just neighborly, just neighborly—that's all!"

"It's more 'n than, Square, a good deal morn 'n that! You stood by us when it seemed 's if everythin' 'd got ter go, 'n there ain't nothin' I've got 't ye can't have!"

"Do ye mean that, Sid?"

"Sure's guns!"

"Wal, I've got a little suthin' on my mind, Sid"—Weasel hesitated.

"Go ahead 'n spit it out!"

"Fact is—I came over this morning for your advice, Sid"—

"Wal, Square?"

"I've lived alone all my life, 'n I'm tired of it! I've been—sorter thinking—lately—of—of getting married." It was out now, and Weasel was relieved.

"Sho! Ye don't say so!"

"I thought of speaking to—to—yer sister."

"Thunder 'n guns! You don't mean ter say 'at ye want Abby!"

"I don't know just how she'll take it, but"—

"What under heaven 'll happen next, I wonder!" The farmer was too astonished for words.

"Is there any reason, Sid, why I shouldn't"—

"Lord, no! She's sound 'n wind 'n limb, 's far 's I know! Leetle sharp 'n the tongue, but ye'll git used ter that 'n time—I have. 'N so ye want Abby! Square, you're a brave man. Shake hands."

"S'pose there's any use 'n saying anything to her?" said Weasel, anxiously.

"Wal, I d' know; ye might try. I'll just sound her a

leetle, 'n see how she feels, 'f ye say so," said Sid, with a grin. Nobody had ever courted Abby; she wouldn't let them, and this seemed, to Sid, like a joke.

"Thank ye, Sid! I sh'll be much obliged!" Weasel was serious enough.

"Stop ter dinner, 'n brace upon some good hard-cider. 'F I k'n put a spoke 'n yer wheel, I will, depend on 't!"

"I'll do it," said Weasel. "I s'pose Joe 'n Faith haven't fixed things yet?"

"No, they hain't! 'N it worries me night and day!"

"You don't s'pose Joe really cared for the other one, do ye?" asked Weasel.

"I don't know what ter think. We've jest got ter give 'em time, Weasel. Some crops take a long spell 'tween plantin' 'n harvestin', 'n this is one 'er them kinds, I guess. Faith tries ter seem happy, as 'f things was all settled, but they ain't! Here she comes now!"

"What! Back again so soon, father!" Faith kissed the old man, and put her arms around his neck. "Good morning, Mr. Clapp! Were you talking about me?" She was sure of it; Weasel's manner betrayed him.

"Yes," said Weasel, "and if you and Joe would listen to all we'd like to say, some folks would be happier!"

"I'm not so sure of that," said Faith, laughing. "Besides, don't you think you are wasting time thinking of me? I am sure Aunt Abby would appreciate it so much more."

"Had ye there, Weasel!" said Sid. "You go in 'n chat ter Abby."

"Don't ye think she'll be too busy?" said Weasel, glancing anxiously toward the kitchen door.

"Not to see *you*, Mr. Clapp," said Faith, "and don't for-

get what I told you about Aunt Abby. She's the dearest, sweetest"——

"I've been thinking about that ever since," said Weasel. "I hate to bother her, but I'll go in."

It was summer, and there was a hot fire in the kitchen stove, but Weasel went in, and shut the door.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"FAITH AND HONOR."

"WHERE'D ye git the flowers, Faith?" said the farmer.

"Guess?"

"Can't!"

"Over there!" Over there, at the farm, had come to mean the foundations for the new house.

"Oho!" said Sid. "Now I wonder why ye want flowers growin' 'round the foundations of Joe's house, that never was built?"

"Father, I couldn't bear to see nothing but weeds there; it looked so lonely, so deserted and hopeless—and so—I dug up the weeds, one by one, and for every weed I've planted a flower."

"Joe's house oughter ben finished long 'fore this. He's lost lots of good time," said Sid.

"But, father, Joe wasn't ready to build, and you mustn't blame him, because he wanted to see the world. I should, if I were a man, like Joe."

"Yes, but Joe forgot that he wasn't building for himself. He was building for the sweetest little woman ter be found, 'f he hunted the whole world over!"

"'Sh! You mustn't talk about that now! That's all over, and you'll make me very unhappy if—if you speak of it," and Faith hid something that was very much like a sob.

"What's ter become of *you*?"

"Of *me*? Why—I'm to stay here—with you—always!" Faith was on the ground, at Sid's feet, pretending to be busy with the daisies and buttercups.

"Look up—look at me, dearie!" Faith looked up for a second, and then looked away.

"Don't, father—don't!"

"Ye love him now!"

"Yes!"

"Wal, the Lord knows where it'll all end, I don't!" The farmer was half angry. "I'll just have ter talk ter Joe!"

"Promise not to say anything to Joe, father! Promise me!"

"No! I can't keep quiet, 'n see Joe makin' a darned fool 'er himself. Here he comes! I'm goin' ter give him my 'pinion 'er him!"

"Father! I must go to the woods—after some ferns!" And away she flew, like a bird, through the orchard.

"The minit he comes, she runs away," said Sid.

"Well, father?"

"Wal, Joe?"

"Wasn't that Faith with you?"

"Ye'up!"

"Why does she always run away when I come near?"

"Wal, Joe, you oughter know. Seems ter me you 'n Faith oughter understand each other by this time."

"I suppose she thinks very badly of me?"

"Hanged 'f I know! It's easier to break a yoke 'er steers 'n ter find out what a woman thinks."

"I don't blame her, I deserve the worst that she can think of me"—

"Wal, I don't pretend ter know much 'bout young folks' ways, 'n so I don't like ter meddle with 'em. But there are times when I feel 's though I'd got something

ter say, 'n this is one 'er them times. 'Pears ter me 't when the Lord made you, Joe, he kinder mixed things up. There's a good deal 've smart man, 'n a lot 'er darned fool 'bout ye!"

"Father!" Joe was angry.

"Now don't git yer back up! What I'm sayin' 's for yer own good, 'n I cal'klate you've got ter stand it for a minute or two. Maybe 'twas all wrong ter lay things out, 'n plan yer lives fer ye. I won't say 'twarn't, as things have turned out, but everything was all right t'll them Dunhas came up here 'n filled yer head with notions; since then everythin's gone wrong!"

"Yes, everything *has* gone wrong!" said Joe.

"Everythin' 'd been all right 'f you'd cared for Faith, but 'f ye couldn't, ye couldn't, that's all."

"Cared for her?" said Joe. "I did care for her. I always have, and always shall. Care for her! Why, I love the ground she walks on, though I know I'm not worth it. I envy every flower that touches her lips. Care for her—sometimes I wish I could change places with the birds that get the crumbs she throws to them, just to be near her always, just to hear what she says when no one else is near! Love her? Why, I'd"—

"Then, why 'n thunderation don't ye tell her so?" Sid was full of anger and joy.

"I don't think Faith cares for me!"

"That's where yer ain't smart! That's the fool side of ye. You're blind 's a bat!"

"Are you sure, Father?"

"Sure?" Go 'n ask Faith what she thinks 've the ground *you* walk on. I'll bet ten ter one it's the same kind 'er soil. Weasel's got some 'er the same kind under

his feet, too. Beats all, this country air. Lord! How it does carry me back to when *I* was young!"

"It's no use, it's too late now," said Joe.

"Too late? What d' ye mean by too late?"

"My pledge to Rose Dunham."

"Wal, what 'er that? Ye don't love *her*, do ye?"

"I can't go to her and say—I am mistaken—or I've changed my mind, and I love some one else"——

"Did ye *ever* love her, Joe?"

"You have no right to ask that question, father—and I won't answer it."

"Can't ye see 't they made a fool on ye? What do ye s'pose they care 'bout yer promise now 't they can't make anythin' out of ye"——

"Not Rose—I won't believe it of her," said Joe. And I won't do anything that is dishonorable—not even to win Faith."

"Wal, I hain't got nothin' more ter say," said Sid, brokenly.

"I have, father! I want to say that if I live to be a hundred, I shall not forget how you stood by me when I was in trouble. I want to say that I'm going to stand by *you* as long as we both live, so that as you grow old, and the strength goes out of your hands, I may take up your burdens and carry them for you."

"God bless you, Joe!"

"Now *we* understand each other, don't we, father?" and Joe took his father's hands in his.

"Yes, Joe, 'n I wish you 'n Faith understood."

"Don't you see that we never can till I am free, father? And if Faith does care for me, she'll wait. Can't you see that, father?"

"Joe, your head's nearer level 'n I thought 'twas."

"I don't know about that—yet—I wish I could hear from Gill"——

"Weasel wants ter talk with ye, 'bout that Nevada land."

"I'll tell you a secret, father. For four weeks Gill and some experts have been out there, to find out the truth; I expect to hear from them every day. They should have arrived in New York yesterday."

"By George! I forgot all about it, but Weasel brought a letter for ye—'n here 'tis."

"That's from Gill," said Joe, as he took the letter, and tore it open.

"Just like me ter forgit that letter! Hope 'tain't nothin' important!" said Sid.

"Father! Where'd Faith go?"

"Over t' the woods; why?"

"Read that!" and Joe was gone.

"Read that!" Can't do it without—where in thunder did I"—— And Sid began the usual endless search for his glasses, which at this moment happened to be on the buggy seat, under the cushion.

"Wal, Sid, it all depends on Joe," said Weasel, coming from the kitchen, and wiping his perspiring face.

"What depends on Joe?" said Sid, turning his pockets out.

"Abby has promised to marry me—with your consent, of course—as soon as Joe and Faith are married."

"Wal, Abby's 've age, 'n k'n do 's she likes. Jest 's a matter 've form, I s'pose I sh'll have ter say yes, but I'm sorry for ye 'f 'et depends on Joe—where in thunder are them glasses? Jest read that letter for me, will ye, Weasel? I can't find my specs." Weasel took the letter, and looked at the signature.

"Gill—who's Gill?"

"Friend 'er Joe's," said Sid. "Hurry up 'n read it!"

This is what the lawyer read:

"Have just returned from Nevada. The mine is real, and I can get you \$40,000 for the Phoenix stock that Edgeley sold you"—

"Jerusalem!" said Sid.

"Dunham was right, the mines are richer, however, than he dreamed. Your friend, who owns the deeds, can sell for any sum he cares to name; I say hold, and work it. This isn't a fairy tale, as I'll prove when I see you. Saw Edgeley yesterday; he is kicking himself full of holes for not hanging on to the old 'Phoenix' that he sold to you. Edgeley was married to Rose Dunham last week. Used to think you were sweet there. Hastily yours—Gill."

"Wal, don't that beat all?" said Sid. Weasel turned the letter around and over, as if he doubted its genuineness.

"Hullo! Here's something more," said he, "'P. S.—Come down and we'll paint the town.'"

"Paint the town? Paint New York? What's he mean, Weasel?" said Sid.

"Wal, I don't quite know myself, Sid. Guess that's some sort of cipher."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"THE FOUNDATION FOR A NEW HOUSE."

JOE found Faith, who hadn't gone to the woods, but just to the end of the orchard. What he said to her wouldn't make two lines in print; but what he said and the time it took to say it, and the times it was repeated, first by Joe, then by Faith, made a chapter in their lives, and they were a long, sweet time saying it, while everybody and everything waited for them. Weasel went in to tell Abby the news, and, that by this time, Joe and Faith were probably fixing it all up. Abby didn't see why that should stop everybody's dinner, but Sid declared that he couldn't eat till Joe and Faith came back, and Hetty slipped out the front door to tell Sim and Medad, who were hoeing, over the other side of the lane; and so the dinner waited.

Faith and Joe, at last, came up out of the shady orchard, together, to face the world, and they began with Sid.

"Father," said Joe. "I have paid my debts, and here is my receipt in full of all demands."

"Hush, Joe! Don't tell anybody—yet!" said Faith, but Joe just took her in his arms, and kissed her. She hid her face against his old blue jumper, and would have run away if Joe hadn't held her.

"Not tell anybody? Why, I couldn't keep it in to save my life; I've got to tell! Father, Faith has promised"—

"Joe! Please don't!"

"Now, children, don't ye fool me again," said Sid. "Two er three times I've thought things was settled, 'n they warn't. Faith, speak out! Is it true?"

Faith said something, that was smothered in blue jean, but the farmer saw her head nod vigorously. Weasel saw it, too, and his happiness ran over, remembering Abby's promise."

"It's true, father!" said Joe, again.

"Then yer richer 'n all the gold 'n silver 'n the world," said Sid, and Weasel, with happy mood and cracked voice, went up to the gate, humming an old, forgotten love song.

"God bless her!" said Joe; "the luck has changed! And it is luck—I haven't done anything to earn it."

"God bless you both!" said Sid, with his arms around them. "Weasel, Abby's your'n!"

"I know it, Sid. But you'd better tell her—I daresn't."

"Beats all how bashful these young lovers be nowadays," said Sid, "'twarn't so when I did my sparkin'! Lord, here she comes, Weasel! We'll git out, 'n give ye a chance!" But Weasel had no mind to face Abby alone, and he stopped Sid at the gate.

Abby, with empty tin water-pail, came out of the kitchen door like a thunder cloud out of the West. With ominous silence she went to the well and filled the pail, then she swept the yard with a sort of lightning glance, saw Joe and Faith together; saw Sid and Weasel shrinking timidly into the background.

"Wal," she said, "ye all look 's though you'd turned ter pillows 'er salt, like Lot's wife. What's the matter?"

"Abby," said Sid, "Abby, Joe 'n Faith 've made it all up"——

"Glad on 't! They've been long 'enough 'bout it. You oughter 'ben a grandfather by this time!" said Abby, tersely.

"Abigail, I'm shamed on ye! Here's Weasel, 'n he's got suthin' ter say to ye"——

"Has he? Wall! Why don't he say it? Nobody's stoppin' him!" It was plain that Abby would not abdicate easily.

"Wal, naturally, he 'xpects a leetle encouragement."

"Wal, I hain't got no time ter fool away now; dinner's ben waitin' a whole hour. The Lord knows where Hetty's got to, 'n I've got both hands full. Rest on ye don't seem ter have nothin' ter do but spoon round. That ain't my way! I told Mr. Clapp 't when Joe 'n Faith was married, good 'n fast, 't I'd think over what he said, 'n I will, but if I stop ter do it now ye won't git no dinner, none on ye! That's the way 'tis!"

Abby went into the house with the pail of water, and slammed the door. It was a way Abby had of cutting off reply.

"That's just a—sort of—way Abby's got," said the farmer to Weasel, anxiously, "you go in 'n kunnoodle 'er out on 't, Square; she don't mean it. Plead yer own case for the first time." Weasel took Sid's advice.

But dinner had to wait a little longer, for in the lane, the other side of the house, Medad's voice could be heard in taunting expostulation with stuttering Sim, Hetty, and the dog vainly trying to quell the disturbance.

"I say 'tain't no fair shakes; leave it ter anybody! I say, Hetty! Ye ain't goin' back on me, be ye? I'll knock yer blamed stutterin' head off, darn ye! Come over 'n Jones' lot 'n say it! Wall!" Medad was striving to overwhelm Sim's halting attempts to speak with words

of his own, that came easily. Hetty ran, for the first time on record, into the yard, quite out of breath.

"Oh, Mr. Morton! Save him! Save him!" said she.

"Which one do ye want saved?" asked the farmer. Hetty thought a moment.

"Neither on 'em good for much, but ye might save Sim." It was the first preference Hetty had ever expressed.

"Boys, boys!" shouted Sid, "what 'n thunderation's the matter with ye!"

Joe ran around to the front of the house, for the unseen trouble began to sound like one of Tige's dispute with another of his kind. Faith, laughing, went to Hetty.

"What is the matter, Hetty?"

"Medad's goin' ter lick Sim, 'n Sim's so mad 't he can't speak. He's madder 'n a wet hen!"

Joe dragged Sim, struggling, through the gate into the yard, Medad, full of fighting valor, following. The farmer caught and held him, Joe and Sim, on one side, Sid and Medad on the other, and Hetty, bashfully toying with apron strings, between them.

"Now, ain't ye' shame 'er yerselves," said Sid.

"Let him go, Joe," said Medad, "'n I'll kick his stutlerin' head off!"

"No, ye won't! You'll stay right here, 'n behave yerself," and the farmer held Medad in a vise.

"G-g-g-go ahead 'n d-d-do it!" said Sim, knowing that he was safe now.

"Le' me go, Sid! Darn it, le' me go!"

"Shet up, 'er I'll break ye 'n two! Yer long enough ter make two 'er Sim. Hang on, Joe!"

"All right! I've got Sim," said Joe.

"Now, then," said Sid, "speak out—don't be all day about it, neither. What's the matter, Sim?"

"He's m-m-mad c-c-cause—I've g-g-got his girl."

"He's a dogoned liar!" said Medad.

"Shet up, both on ye! Hetty, it's time this was settled. Which one on 'em do ye want?"

"Wal—I've sorter promised Sim," said she.

"Nobody 'll marry 'em," said Medad. "Sim couldn't answer the minister in a month."

"Sim, you've got the prize, good luck to you!" said Joe, releasing his captive."

"Now behave yerself, Medad," said Sid. "There's jest 's good fish 'n the sea 's ever was caught. Say nothin', 'n go fishin'." Sim and Hetty went to lean over the gate. Medad sat under the tree, and whittled a shingle for the next ten minutes.

"Ain't you folks never comin' ter dinner? Vittles 'er all gittin' cold." It was Abby, but the sharpness was gone from her voice. She had abdicated.

"Wal, I'm hungry 'nough to eat a horse, 'n chase the rider," said Sid. "S'pose the rest on ye k'n live without eatin' now. Lord! Lord! How happy you're all goin' ter be, now ain't nothin' to it! Come on, le's go in, 'n 'fore we eat we'll lift up our voices 'n ask the Good Giver of all things t' look down 'n bless these hearts 'n make 'em one, 'n Joe, we'll order the lumber ter-morrer!"

"For the house, Joe?" said Faith.

"Yes, Faith, ours!" said Joe.

"Foundation's been waiting a long time, Joe," said Weasel.

"It will be all the stronger, for being well seasoned," said Joe.

"I'm glad I cleared away the weeds, and planted flowers instead," said Faith.

"God bless you, and keep the weeds out of our lives," said Joe, earnestly.

"Amen, ter that, Joe," said Sid.

THE END.

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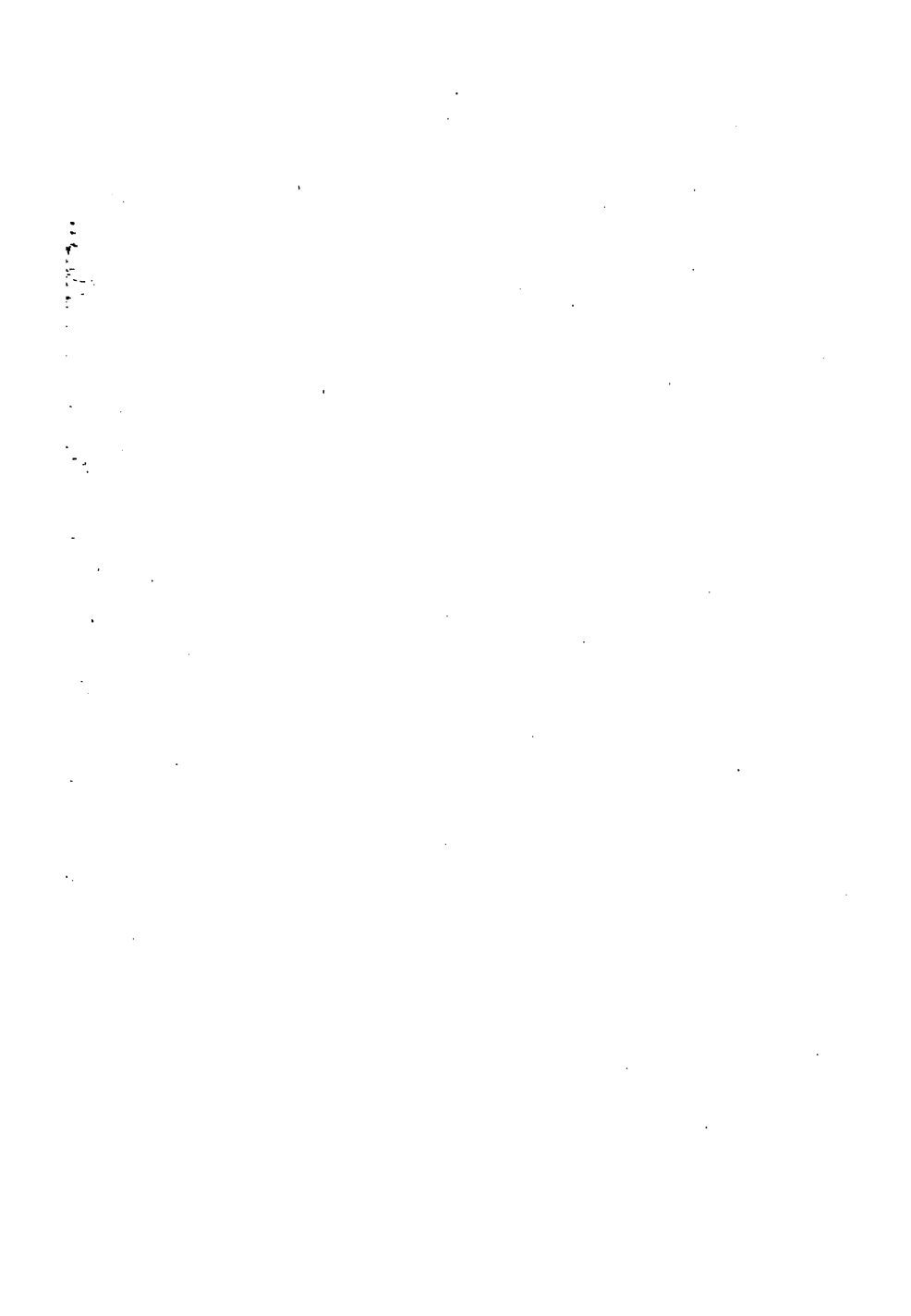
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